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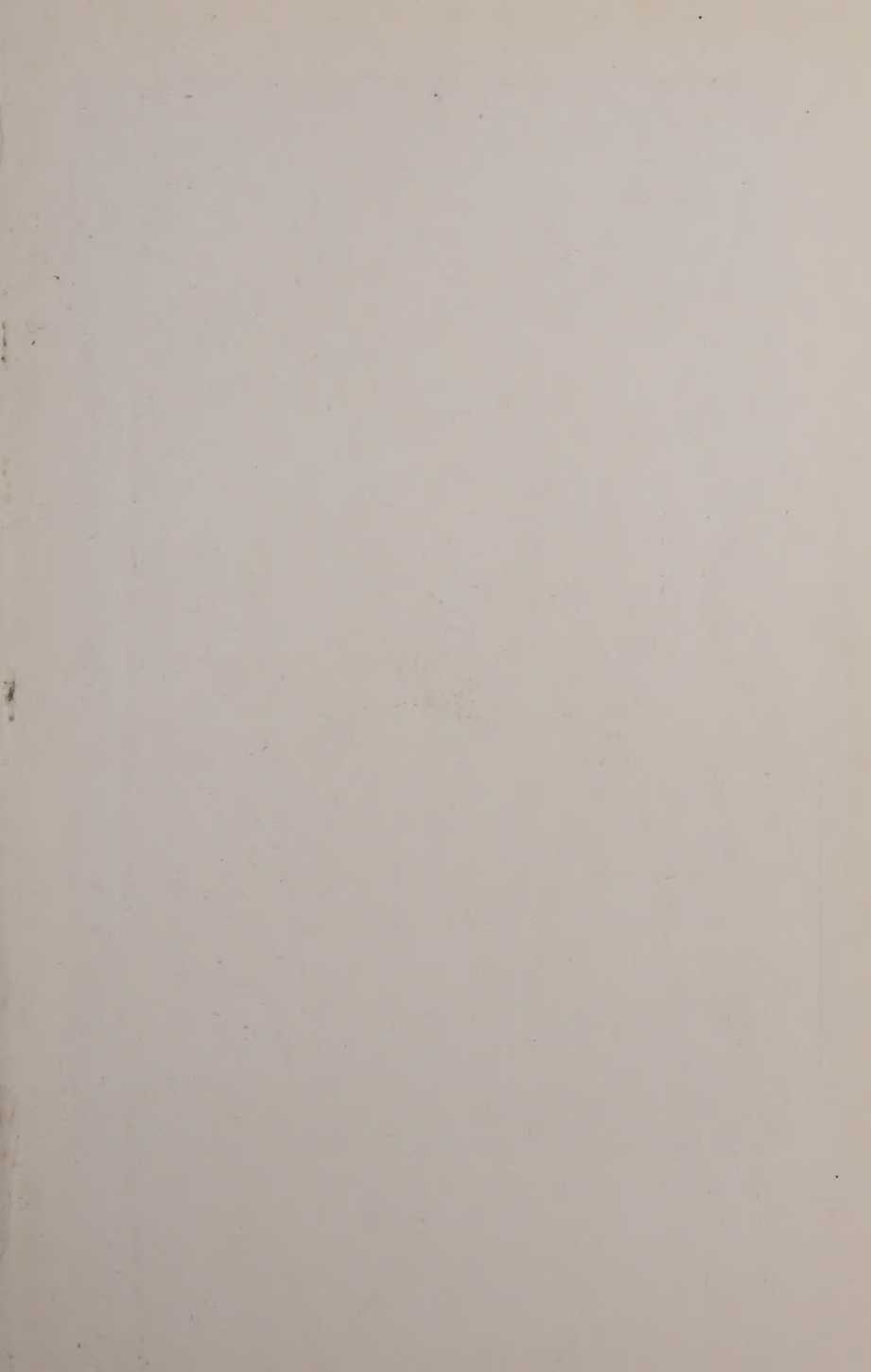


Colin Rich.

Prize for excellent record
throughout the year.

July 1929.

W. C. Baston.
Headmaster.





"RUSTEM BORE THE GREAT ROCK EASILY TO THE SHAH'S TENT"

Fr.

Edward Osmond

THE BOOK OF EPIC HEROES

BY
AMY CRUSE

AUTHOR OF
"THE BOOK OF MYTHS" "ENGLISH LITERATURE
THROUGH THE AGES" ETC.

WITH EIGHTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR
AND BLACK AND WHITE



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INTRODUCTION

THE first stories which the early peoples of the world made for themselves were the myths. In these attempts were made to explain various facts of nature which puzzled our forefathers' childlike intelligence—summer and winter, light and darkness, thunder, lightning, rain. Gods and goddesses were invented, and each was said to take a particular part in the ordering and sustaining of the world; among the Greeks, for example, Apollo was god of the sun, Demeter goddess of the harvest, Jove made the thunder, and the smoke of the volcanoes came from the underground forge of Hephæstus. Details and incidents were gradually added, and the myth grew from a bare outline or fable into a long and interesting story. The characters of these stories, though they started as embodiments of natural forces or objects, became real men and women, only with special wonder-working powers.¹

From this the next step in story-telling was taken naturally and easily. Men began to concern themselves not only with the gods above, but also with their fellow-men, and the poets sang of brave deeds done by warriors upon earth instead of by deities from Olympus. But these early peoples had, as children have in all ages, a strong tendency toward the marvellous, and the myths had accustomed them to stories which were full of wonders and superhuman happenings. So that very soon, as we believe, they began to add to their tales of deeds that had actually been done other incidents which came only from their wonder-loving imaginations.

As time went on the memory of the man whose deeds were being sung grew dim, and then more and more alterations were made in the story. Sometimes two stories were joined, and a legend grew up in which one man was given some one else's meed of glory as

¹ See *The Book of Myths*, by Amy Cruse (Harrap).

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well as his own ; or sometimes ideas and incidents from one of the myths were mingled with the newer story. In this way the imaginations of our forefathers created a special race of beings whom they called ' heroes,' and the numberless ballads about a particular hero became what is called an ' epic,' that is, a poem containing nothing but genuine legends which had sprung from the hearts of the common people during the early period of their national history.

The heroes, so it was believed, were partly men and partly gods, and they therefore had strength and skill and wisdom far above that which an ordinary man could possess. The heroes were also under the special protection of one or other of the most powerful gods of the race, who came to their help when they were in great trouble or difficulty, and guided and advised them by supernatural means at all times. So that in the stories about these old heroes all sorts of marvellous and unexpected things happen, just as they do in a fairy-tale.

The stories, then, are generally made up of a mixture of myth and legend, with a foundation of historic fact. Such are the stories told in this book of Odysseus, Sigurd, Rustem, Cuchulain, Finn, Beowulf, and Marko. They are all fighting men, and their chief glory lies in the hard blows they gave and the number of men they killed. But they had higher qualities too. They were loyal and faithful, and they fought not for themselves, but to help the weak or to free their country from danger or oppression.

As the years went on men grew out of the childlike habit of mind, and could no longer accept marvels and miracles as ordinary, everyday occurrences. The stories they made about their heroes changed in character, and the word ' hero ' began to take on the meaning which it now bears for us—a man made after the same fashion as other men, but with a high and noble spirit, which makes him ready to attempt deeds of valour and daring from which most of his fellows would shrink in fear.

For a long time some traces of the old magic clung about the heroes, as may be seen in the stories of Roland and Hereward. But at length this dropped away, and in the stories of the Cid, Robin Hood, William Tell, and Robert Bruce we have

Introduction

simply the man who won his high place by his own great qualities.

The heroes of this new class were still mainly fighters, and still men counted with pride the number of bodies in the heaps of slain that they were wont to pile up around them. Physical courage and endurance were the qualities which our ancestors most admired, and it was long before they recognized as a hero the man whose strength lay in his mind and his soul rather than in his body.

Yet as we read these old stories we cannot but admit that these heroes of a bygone age must have had fine and noble spirits to uphold them under their many trials, and stout and cheerful hearts to make light of them.

THE BOOK OF EPIC HEROES

CHAPTER I

ODYSSEUS

ODYSSEUS was King of Ithaca, a small island in the Ionian Sea. Like all the heroes who joined in the war against Troy, he was a great fighting man, but there was none so wise and cunning and eloquent as he. One and all had been stirred by the grief of Menelaus, King of Sparta, whose wife, Helen, had been carried off by Paris, son of the King of Troy, and these men, the rulers and nobles of Greece, had united to avenge him and bring Helen back to her home. For nine years they besieged Troy, and in the tenth year it fell, chiefly through a cunning plan devised by Odysseus.

By his advice the Greeks made a great wooden horse, inside whose body a band of men could hide. Then they broke up their camp, and all except the hidden men went down to their ships and sailed away.

The Trojans believed that their enemies were departing, and, full of joy, they came out from their city. In the midst of the deserted camp they saw the great wooden horse. Against the advice of one of their wisest men they dragged it within the city walls. Then, in the middle of the night, the band of concealed Greeks came out and opened the gates to their comrades, who had secretly returned and were waiting outside. The Trojans, taken by surprise, were easily overcome, and the town was destroyed.

After the conquest of Troy the Greeks set out to return to their homes, and the adventures that befell Odysseus and his followers in their attempts to reach Ithaca are told in the great

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Homeric poem called the *Odyssey*, from which is taken the story related here.

THE ten years' war was over. The Greeks had conquered, and Troy was burnt to the ground. All along the shore the victors were busy with their ships, loading them with the spoil they had taken, and getting them ready for the long voyage which would bring them back to the beautiful land of Greece. All hearts were light, and the men as they worked thought of their homes and their wives and children, and wondered what changes they would find, and whether they would recognize the little ones they had left in the youths and maidens who would be there to meet them.

Twelve of the ships belonged to Odysseus, King of Ithaca, and on these the men were straining every nerve in their efforts to hasten the time of sailing. The eye of their master was upon them and his voice urged them on. In all that company there was none more eager to get back to Greece than he. He longed to see his wife Penelope and his little son Telemachus, whom he had left unwillingly ten years before, and he did not rest until at last all was ready and the twelve stout vessels set out on their homeward voyage.

The wind was favourable, the men toiled hard at the oars, and the ship sped through the water. Soon they came to Ismarus, a rich city of the Ciconians, and Odysseus, thinking to gain more spoil to take home with him, brought his ships to the shore and ordered his men to attack the city. The attack was successful, but afterward, as the men lingered on the shore, fresh bodies of Ciconians from the neighbouring cities came up and fell upon the Greeks before they could reach their ships. They fought bravely, but six out of each boat's crew were killed before they managed to make their way to their vessels and push out from the shore.

It was a bad beginning, and the men's hearts were heavy as they bent to their oars. Scarcely were they out in the open sea when a hurricane arose, and for ten days they were driven before the wind. When at length it died down they were far out

Odysseus

of their course, and they made for the nearest land where they might draw up their battered ships and mend the broken masts and torn sails.

After they had rested and taken a fresh supply of water, Odysseus sent three of his men to search out the inhabitants of the country and bring back word what manner of men they were. Long he waited, but they did not return, and at length, with a few followers, he set out to find them.



"RISE, I SAY, AND COME WITH ME"

Soon he came upon them among a company of the people of the land, all sitting or lying in idle ease on fragrant green banks shaded by lotos-trees which were loaded with ripe and luscious fruit. Their eyes were closed, their limbs relaxed and feeble, their faces expressed nothing but a soft and dreamy contentment.

As Odysseus drew near the natives, mild-eyed men, with soft voices and gentle manners, came toward him, carrying branches from the lotos-trees, which with gracious friendly gestures they offered to the stranger. Odysseus sternly waved them back.

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"Come no nearer," he commanded, and then he called to his men, bidding them rise and come with him. But they only opened their drowsy eyes and looked at him vacantly, then sank down to their happy dreams once more; for they had eaten of the lotos, and he who once tastes that fruit forgets wife and child and home, forgets his work and his ambition, and only desires to lie at ease among the flowers, and dream away the long, bright days.

Odysseus saw at once what had happened, and he spoke again in a tone of stern command.

"Rise, I say, and come with me. This land is not your home, and in Greece, far over the sea, your friends await you."

But still the men heeded not, nor stirred at the names of Greece and home. Then Odysseus turned to the men he had brought with him.

"Take these your comrades," he commanded, "and bear them back to the ships."

His followers seized the sleepers and back to the ships they went. The rowers took their places and soon they were out on the open sea. For a time the three men remained dreamy and languid; then the effect of the fruit they had eaten passed away, and they became once more their old selves.

Westward went the ships until the island of Sicily came in sight. Very green and pleasant it looked to the weary travellers as they rested on their oars and looked at it across the water. They could see clear streams running down grassy slopes on which many sheep and cattle were feeding; and here and there thin lines of smoke went up, showing that men of some race had their homes in that quiet, lovely place.

"Stay you here at anchor," Odysseus ordered the men of all the ships save the one which he himself commanded, "while I and my crew go to seek food and find out what race of men dwell on the island."

With his twelve men he landed on the beach, found a cunning hiding-place for his ship beneath an overhanging cliff, and set off over the grassy slopes. Soon they came to an enormous cave, and, entering it, saw lambs and kids in their pens and a great store of

Odysseus

butter and milk and cheese. Very tempting was this food to the hungry Greeks.

"Nothing is to be touched," commanded Odysseus; "we will wait until the master of the cave comes back, and then we will ask his hospitality, which without doubt he will willingly afford us."

So they waited, eyeing the food longingly, until presently they heard a great noise outside and felt the ground shake under the heavy tread of some one who was approaching. Then a flock of sheep and goats came in, one after another in orderly fashion; and then the opening of the cave was darkened by the huge form of a giant, who carried in his arms an enormous bundle of firewood. This he threw down just inside, and then rolled a great stone to the mouth of the cave, so that none could pass in or out.

Odysseus and his companions looked on in horror. The giant was very ugly, and had only one eye, a great, round, staring eye that was placed in the middle of his forehead. The Greeks drew silently back into the darkest part of the cave, waiting to see what this terrible monster would do next. For a little while he did not see them, but milked his ewes one after another, setting aside part of the milk for making cheese and part for drinking. But when he had done this he threw a great handful of sticks on the dying fire, lighting up the dark corners of the cave and revealing the shrinking strangers.

"Who are you?" he thundered in his terrible voice, "and where do you come from?"

Odysseus stepped forward and spoke very humbly. "We are Greeks," he said, "and we come from the siege of Troy, where our nation has lately won great glory. Our ship was dashed on your coast by the waves, and, being hungry and destitute, we set out in search of food. When we saw your cave we thought that so rich a man, and one who had such great store of food, would surely help us in our terrible need, and so we waited, touching not one mouthful of cheese or milk, for your return."

"What is your name?" growled the giant.

"My name is Noman," answered the wily Odysseus, "and I and my companions crave your hospitality in the name of the gods."

For answer the giant stretched out his enormous hand and took

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up two of the Greek sailors. He killed them by dashing their heads against the walls of the cave, and then he sat down, and, before the eyes of their shuddering comrades, devoured their bodies with great enjoyment. When he had finished he drank a great draught of milk and lay down on the floor to sleep.

Odysseus waited until the mighty snores which shook the walls of the cavern told him that the giant was really asleep. Then he stole out and looked down on the huge form, fingering his sword and considering whether he should thrust it into the monster as he lay unconscious. "But," he thought, "if I killed him we could not, with all our strength, stir the great stone with which he closed the cavern, and we should be imprisoned here until we died. I must think of some other way of escape."

He stole back to his companions, and they talked together in whispers, but could think of no plan that would save them from the horrible fate that had befallen their two comrades.

Morning came and the giant rose up briskly, milked his flock, made his cheese from the milk he had set aside the night before, and put the cave in order. The miserable Greeks had watched him, trembling, awaiting the moment that came all too soon. He turned suddenly, seized two of them, killed them as he had killed their companions the night before, and sat down to make a hearty breakfast of their bodies. When he had finished he went to the entrance of the cave, pushed aside the rock, and drove his flock out on to the hillside. Then he followed them, and carefully replaced the stone.

Left to themselves the eight Greeks who were left talked eagerly together, and at last Odysseus hit on a plan of escape. They made their preparations, and, finding a huge pine club in a corner of the cave, they pointed it, hardened it in the fire, and hid it under the straw that covered the floor. Then, everything being ready, they waited anxiously for the giant's return.

When darkness fell he came, driving in his flock, with his terrible eye fixed all the time on his prisoners. The milking being done, he seized two more of the Greeks and devoured them. Then Odysseus came forward with a bowl filled with wine from a jar they had brought with them.

Odysseus

"Here is wine of Greece," he said, "sparkling and strong, and such as makes the heart glad. Taste now, for it is good, O mighty one, to drink after a meal."

"My name is Polyphemus," growled the giant. "I will taste your wine," and he reached out his hand for the bowl. He tasted it, and liked it so much that he drank it all and asked for more. Odysseus filled the bowl again, and again the giant drank.

"'Tis good wine indeed," he said, "and in return for it I will grant you this favour, my little Noman. I will not eat you until I have eaten all your comrades."

Again and again the giant drank, until he grew drowsy and helpless, and at last sank into a heavy, drunken sleep on the floor. This was the moment for which the wily Odysseus had waited. He signed to his men to take out the great club from its hiding-place and thrust the pointed end into the fire, and when it was red-hot he took the club and drove it straight and deep into the great eye of the sleeping giant.

Such shrieks and howls of pain and anger arose that the Greeks ran to hide themselves in the farthest corners of the cave, lest the maddened monster might in his rage tread them beneath his feet or strike them with his hands that beat the air in agony. Outside the cave gathered a crowd of the inhabitants of the country, who, like Polyphemus, had only one eye and were called Cyclopes.

"What is it?" they cried. "Why do you so shriek and rage, Polyphemus? Who is it that has hurt you?"

"It is Noman," roared the furious giant. "Noman has hurt me."

"Noman!" replied the Cyclopes. "Then all is well."

"I die!" again screamed Polyphemus, "and Noman has given the blow."

"It is, then, the act of the gods," said the Cyclopes, "and none can help you"; and they went back to their beds.

All night the giant stormed and raved, and the Greeks dared not for a moment take their eyes off him, lest in his frenzied gropings one of his huge hands should find them out. Yet even now the cool and daring Odysseus went quietly on with his plans for escape. Noiselessly he stole toward a bundle of osiers that

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was lying in the corner of the cave, and then turned to where the frightened sheep were huddled together, bleating and crying in alarm. He chose three of the biggest rams, and skilfully bound them together with a piece of osier, signing to each of his men to do the same ; and then with pieces of osier he bound one of his men underneath the middle ram of each three.

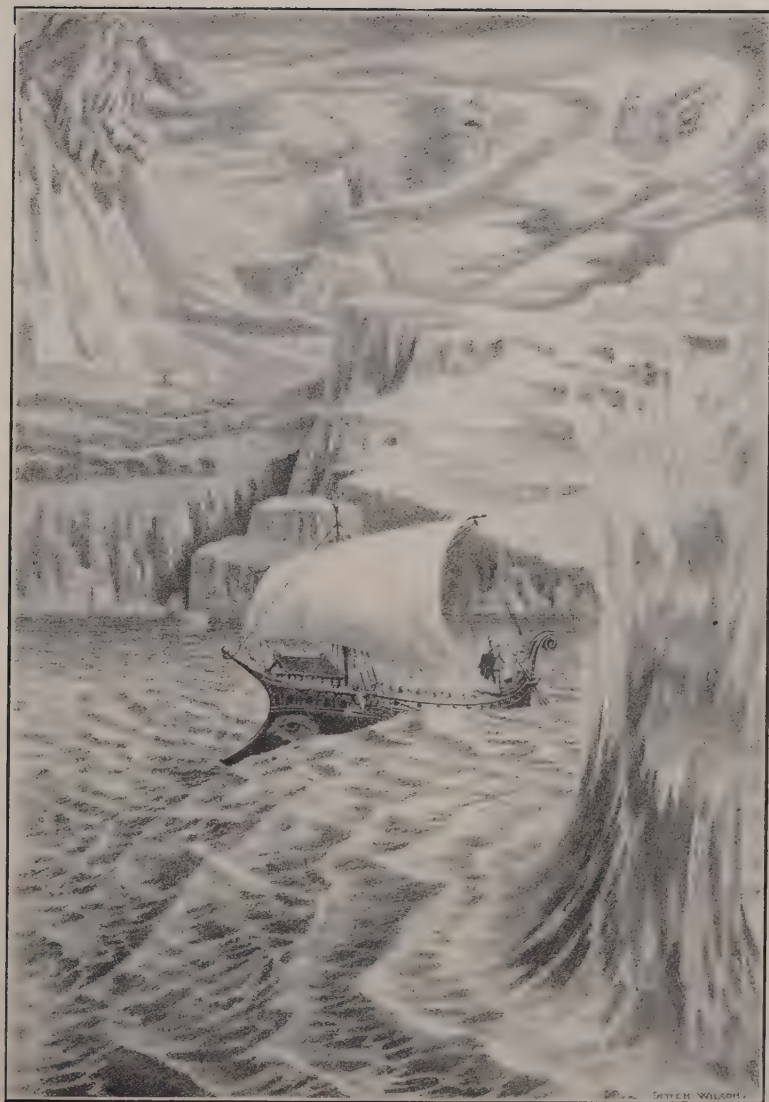
By this time the first rays of the sun were finding their way into the cave, and the blinded giant, though he could not see them, knew by the songs of the birds and other sounds that came from outside that the night had passed. He rose and groped his way to the entrance to the cave and pushed away the great stone. Then he stood in the doorway, blocking it entirely, and called his sheep to come out into the light. Gladly the uneasy animals hurried forward three by three, and as they came their master felt very carefully all over their backs, lest the Greeks should be trying to escape by riding them. It never occurred to his slow wits that men could be hidden underneath the animals, so one by one, after those terrible moments when the giant's cruel hands were so near to them, the men passed out to sunlight and freedom.

Last of all came Odysseus, clinging to the wool of the loudly crying ram, for there had been no one to bind him, as he had bound the rest. But he passed safely, and at last all were out. Then he cut the bonds of his men, and away they raced toward the shore, driving the best of the flock before them.

They found their ship and quickly dragged it from its hiding-place, set it afloat, and drove in as many sheep as it would carry ; then, springing in themselves, they rowed out swiftly from the land. Then Odysseus stood up, and in a voice that rang over sea and rocks called out, " Polyphemus."

The giant, who was still waiting at the door of his cave to see if the Greeks would venture out, turned with a start.

" Polyphemus," went on the mocking voice, " now have the gods punished you for your falseness and your cruelty. Know that it is I, Odysseus, who have put out your eye, and who with all my men have escaped out of your reach, and am in my ship again, sailing to my own land."



ODYSSEUS DERIDES POLYPHEMUS

Patten Wilson



CIRCE AND THE FOLLOWERS OF ODYSSEUS

Patten Wilson

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Odysseus

Down toward the shore rushed the maddened Polyphemus, and seizing a huge rock he hurled it into the water, hoping to destroy the boat of his triumphant enemy. But by reason of his blindness he could not take aim and the rock fell short, though it made such a mighty splash that it almost swamped the vessel.

Still calling out taunts, Odysseus passed on his way, and soon came to the rest of his ships and to his men who had been waiting anxiously for his return.

But though it seemed as if Odysseus had gained a great triumph over Polyphemus, yet really this encounter was the cause of all the misfortunes which fell upon him, one after another, in the years that followed. For Polyphemus was a son of Poseidon, god of the sea, and as the blinded giant heard the taunting voice of Odysseus die away in the distance he cried aloud to his father.

"Father Poseidon, avenge me, I pray you, on this Odysseus. Grant that he may never again see his own land of Ithaca ; or at least that he may come to it only after long wandering, without friends or treasure, and may find his home filled with foes."

The great Poseidon heard the prayer of his son, and from that moment his vengeance followed Odysseus wherever he went. He could not bring the Greek to utter destruction, for Zeus and Athene loved and protected him, but, since Odysseus must needs travel over the sea, there were many ways in which Poseidon, who reigned supreme in his own realm, could thwart and injure him.

But Odysseus knew nothing of this, and with light hearts he and his men set the ships once more upon their homeward course. Soon they came to the Æolian islands, to whose king, Æolus, Zeus had given the charge of all the winds that blow over the world. He had heard of Odysseus and the great things he had done, and so he received the Greeks very kindly, and for some days they rested and feasted in his palace. When they were going he drew Odysseus aside, and gave him a great leather bag tied with a silken string.

"This bag," he said, "contains all the winds of heaven, except the one needed to carry you on your way. If you keep it tied up you may be sure of a favourable journey, but if you loosen the string the winds will rush out and you will be at their mercy."

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Odysseus warmly thanked the King, and very carefully he bore the precious bag to his ship. His sailors noticed how he watched over the bag and never let it out of his sight, and they concluded that it must contain some very precious treasure that Æolus had given to their master. They whispered discontentedly together that the treasure should have been divided, and that each man ought to have his share.



THE WINDS ARE LET LOOSE

For nine days and nights the ships went merrily on, for the west wind blew, the sea was calm, and their course was free from rocks and dangers. All the time Odysseus had stood at the helm, without sleep or rest, so anxious was he that no mischance should delay them, even for an hour. On the tenth evening he saw in the distance a dim line against the sky, which he knew was the shore of his own loved land of Ithaca.

"It is done!" he said to himself joyfully. "All danger is over, and there is naught to fear. There before me lies my own dear country; in a few hours my foot will once more press

Odysseus

the soil of Ithaca. I will go and snatch a little sleep, for it is not meet that I should come back to my home bowed down and weary."

He gave orders to his men to cast anchors for the night and have everything ready for landing the next morning. Then, forgetting in his joy and excitement the bag of winds, he laid down to sleep.

The men, when they knew him to be sleeping, gathered together, and eyed the great leather bag greedily.

"The treasure belongs to us as much as to Odysseus," they said, "for it is our right to have a share in all spoil."

At last they decided to look inside the bag and see what it contained. They cut the silken string, and at once out rushed the fierce winds. They were angry at being shut up for so long, and cramped with having to coil themselves in so small a space, and now they were free they rushed and roared and whirled and struggled one with another. Such a terrible storm arose as had never been known before. The sea rose in waves mountains high; the ships were torn from their anchors and were driven back far out of their course.

At the first sound of the uproar Odysseus had awaked, and, springing up, had taken command of the ship. But nothing he could do could hinder the whole fleet being driven far out to sea; and the ships were so tossed and battered that it seemed every moment as if they must be broken to pieces.

After many weary days and nights the fury of the storm lessened and the ships were driven ashore once more on one of the Æolian islands. Æolus came down to greet them, and when he heard what had happened and how his gift, which ought to have taken them safely and swiftly home, had only brought disaster upon them, he said, "It is clear to me, Odysseus, that this is the work of the gods. Their anger is upon you, and against them what man can do avails nothing. Get you hence, for I can help you no more."

Very sorrowfully the Greeks started once more on their way home, this time rowing with pain and labour instead of being wafted gaily along by favourable winds. After many days they came to the land of the Læstrygonians, and the weary men, seeing

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there a large land-locked harbour, where their ships might be safely moored, rowed gladly into it. Only Odysseus with his ship remained outside, for he was too cautious to put himself into the power of the unknown inhabitants of the land.

It was not long before these people appeared on the high cliffs bordering the harbour—wild, savage-looking men, who shouted and yelled so that the Greeks started up in affright. Seizing huge stones from the cliffs, the Læstrygonians threw them down upon the ships, several of which broke up and sank. Then the savage men rushed down upon the strangers, seized those who were struggling in the water and those who remained in their ships. Odysseus and his men, watching from outside the harbour, saw their unfortunate comrades carried off, and a little later they saw, with shuddering horror, fires made on the cliffs above, at which the Læstrygonians roasted the bodies and then sat down in glee to their horrid feast.

“Take your oars,” commanded Odysseus, “and row quickly out to sea.”

His men hurried to obey. There was only one ship left now of the proud fleet that had sailed from Troy, and its crew, mourning for their comrades, had little heart for the labour at the oar, and almost despaired of seeing grassy Ithaca again. But Odysseus spoke brave and cheering words, so that their spirits were lightened; and by and by another island came in sight. Then Odysseus divided his crew into two companies, and said to one of the men, whose name was Eurylochus, “Take now this one company and go carefully over the island, then bring me news of what you have seen. I with the other company will remain to guard the ship.”

Eurylochus led his men through a dense forest, where they saw many wild animals—lions, tigers, wolves, and bears; but to their great surprise these were gentle and mild in their manners, and looked up into the faces of the strangers with such a piteous expression that the Greeks felt a great compassion and longed to help them. But Eurylochus exhorted them not to linger, and so they pressed on until they heard the sound of sweet music. Drawing near they saw a splendid palace, and within the open door a beautiful woman sitting.

Odysseus

This was Circe, the daughter of the Sun, and when she saw them she came forward, and with smiles and courteous words invited them to enter. Eagerly all pressed forward, except Eurylochus, who remained, doubtful and hesitating, in the porch. Circe directed her servants to bring food and wine for the famished sailors, and they ate heartily of the good things, while the hungry Eurylochus watched them from the porch and was almost tempted to enter.

Suddenly he started back in horror, for Circe, her smiles fading and her beautiful eyes gleaming with cruel triumph, rose from her seat and waved her wand over the Greeks, touching each on the head. Instantly they took the form of animals, and Circe contemptuously ordered her servants to drive them away to their sties.

Eurylochus, full of horror, hurried back to tell the dread tale to Odysseus ; and the leader, sword in hand, set out to rescue his followers. As he was striding angrily through the woods he met a beautiful youth, who was really the god Hermes.

"Return to your ship," he cried, "and come no nearer to this dread Circe, for she will do to you as she has done to your companions."

"Nay," replied Odysseus, "a man cannot leave his comrades to perish. I go to save them or to share their misery."

Nothing that Hermes could say would induce him to turn back, and at length the god drew from his robe a sprig of some green herb and gave it to the undaunted Greek.

"Take then this sprig of moly," he said ; "it will, if you use it aright, bring Circe's spells to naught, and help you to save your friends. But you will need a brave heart and an unyielding temper."

Odysseus thanked the youth gratefully and went on his way. When he came to Circe's palace he was received courteously, and offered food and wine. He ate heartily, but with his eye always on the enchantress, and when she rose and lifted her wand he was ready.

"Go seek your sty and wallow with your companions," she cried ; but Odysseus, protected by the herb moly, drew his sword and rushed upon her.

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"Now shall you die," he cried, "unless you promise to restore my comrades to their human shape and do them no further harm."

Terrified and bewildered to find that here was a mortal who could resist her enchantments, Circe promised. In a few minutes the followers of Odysseus, each in his own form, had gathered round him.

Now, when all were safe, Odysseus should have returned to his ship, but Circe smiled on him so sweetly, and begged him so earnestly to stay and feast with her, that he yielded. The next day it was the same, and the next. Feast succeeded feast, and music, dancing, and revelling made the hours pass swiftly.

Weeks and months went by, and it seemed as if Odysseus had forgotten his home in fair Ithaca and was content to spend the rest of his life idling and feasting with Circe the enchantress. His men soon tired of the revels and were impatient to continue their homeward journey, and at last, when a year had passed, they spoke to Odysseus, entreating him to linger no longer in this unworthy ease.

Their words filled Odysseus with shame, and it seemed as if some spell that had been cast over him was broken. He went at once to Circe, and told her that he must depart. Cunningly she sought to entrap him once more, with soft words and promises of richer delights than any he had enjoyed before, but he would have none of her blandishments.

When she saw that he was determined to go she bade him make a journey to Pluto's dark realm underground and consult the seer Tiresias as to what he should do, and Odysseus, nothing daunted, set out.

He returned in safety, having seen Tiresias, who had warned him of many dangers yet to come, especially against what would happen if he or his men harmed the sacred cattle of the Sun that fed on the pastures of Trinacria. Circe saw that her power over him was gone. Sadly she saw the Greeks set sail, with all their spirits and their courage revived. A favouring wind filled their sails, and soon they came to the rocky coast where dwelt the famous Sirens.

Odysseus

These Sirens were beautiful maidens, who sang with such wonderful and alluring sweetness that sailors, listening to them, forgot all about watching and guiding their ships, and so were dashed against the rocks and wrecked. Circe had warned Odysseus of these Sirens, and had told him what he must do to be safe from their wiles ; so now he called his men together and gave them his directions.

“ Draw near to me,” he said, “ and I will fill your ears with



ODYSSEUS AND THE SIRENS

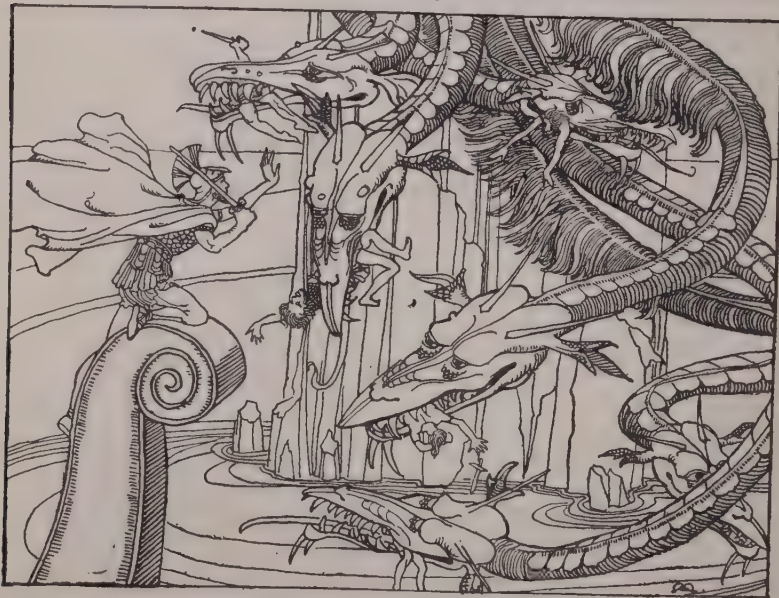
melting wax, for if the song of the Sirens should enter them your death is certain. I alone can hear that song and live ; but when I hear it a longing which I shall not be able to resist will draw me to them, and if I go I shall perish. Bind me, therefore, fast to the mast, in such a way that, though I strive and strain, I cannot set myself free ; and though I entreat and command you to unloose me, yet pay no heed, but steer straight on until the Sirens' voices can be heard no longer.”

Faithfully the men obeyed his commands. They bound him

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straitly to the mast, and though when the wondrous song sounded in his ears he entreated them to unloose him, and raged and threatened, they paid no heed, but rowed straight on until the danger was passed. Then they set him free, and he thanked them for their steadfastness.

Another danger was fast approaching. Soon they must pass through a narrow strait, and on one side of this lay Scylla, on the other Charybdis. Scylla was a snake monster who lived in a cave



SCYLLA SEIZES SIX OF ODYSSEUS' MEN

high up on the cliff, and from this she thrust out her six horrible heads and devoured any who came within her reach. Charybdis was a monster equally horrible who lived in a cave beneath a fig-tree. She could draw all the water around her into her great jaws, and with it men and even ships; and round about her cave there was a constant swirl of water into which, if a ship were drawn, it was lost.

Odysseus put on all his armour, took his sword in his hand, and stood on the prow of his vessel ready to strike the terrible Scylla

Odysseus

as soon as one of her heads should appear. The steersman, pale and trembling, fixed his eyes on the whirlpool of Charybdis, and strove to keep his ship from its swirling waters.

Suddenly there was a fearful cry. Scylla had stretched out her long, snaky neck, and each of her six mouths had seized a man and dragged him into her cave before Odysseus could strike a blow. This was to him more bitter than anything that had gone before. To see six of his faithful followers dragged to such a horrible fate, and to be unable to help or avenge them tore his heart. But there was nothing to be gained by lingering, and sadly they passed on.

The next place they sighted was Trinacria, the island of the Sun, where his two fair daughters tended their father's cattle.

"Steer not for the island," cried Odysseus, "for to rest here is forbidden us. Tiresias the seer bade me beware of the cattle of the Sun."

But the men were faint and weary with toiling at the oar and with the dangers and alarms they had passed through, and they insisted that they must have some rest. Odysseus saw that, whether he consented or not, they had made up their minds to land on the island.

"Swear, then," he said, "by the gods of the Greeks that you will not lay hands on one of the cattle of the Sun, and that at dawn to-morrow you will depart from the island."

Very willingly the men took the oath that he required, and then they drew the ship up on the shore, and after they had made a meal on the food with which Circe had stored their ship, they thankfully lay down to rest. In the night a great tempest arose, and when they went down to the shore the next morning Odysseus was obliged to own that it was impossible to set sail. So they stayed on the island waiting for a favourable wind, which was very long in coming. Soon they had eaten all the food they had brought with them, and then they hunted and fished, but caught little, for there were few animals, save the sacred cattle, on the island. The men began to grumble at the shortness of food, but Odysseus held them straitly to the oath they had sworn.

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One day, about a month after they had come to Trinacria, he set off by himself on a hunting expedition, determined to find food for his discontented followers. While he was gone the men gathered in a council, and decided that, in spite of their oath, they would kill some of the cattle of the Sun.

"We will offer up part of the flesh as a sacrifice to the gods," they said, "and when we get back to Ithaca we will make great gifts to Helios at his altar."

So they drove off the best of the cattle and slew them. Then they made a great fire, and, after setting aside a part of the flesh for sacrifice, they put the rest on spits, but to their horror there came piteous lowings from the fire, and the skins that they had stripped from the animals began to move about and walk.

At this moment Odysseus came back, and saw the fire, the meat, and the terrified, shamefaced men who stood looking helplessly at one another. Yet all his persuasions could not induce them to leave the stolen meat, though the signs of the god's anger were so clearly shown. As soon as it was done they feasted upon it, and next day, and for several days; but Odysseus refused to touch a morsel.

At last, when all the meat was gone and a fair wind was blowing, they consented to leave the island; and Odysseus felt a great relief as they left the shore. But they were not so easily to escape the wrath of the outraged god. His daughters had brought him news of the attack on his cattle, and he had gone in anger to Zeus, demanding that the offenders should be punished.

"'Tis just," replied the King of the Gods, "and you shall have speedy vengeance."

From his throne on high Olympus he cast a thunderbolt on the rapidly moving ship. At once a great storm arose, with thunder and lightning and hail. The mast was shattered and fell, killing the pilot, and at last the ship broke up, and all the men were cast into the sea and drowned. Odysseus clung to a spar, and for nine days he was blown about hither and thither, and cruelly buffeted by the waves; but at last the wind ceased and the waves sank, and he was cast upon the shore of the island of Ogygia.



THE BUILDING OF THE RAFT
Patten Wilson



PENELOPE OUTWITS THE SUITORS

Patten Wilson

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Odysseus

On this island lived a beautiful sea-nymph named Calypso. She was kind-hearted and hospitable, and when she heard that a shipwrecked sailor had been thrown upon her shores she ordered that he should be fed and clothed and treated with all honour. By and by he was brought into her presence, and when she knew who he was and listened to the tale of his wanderings and misfortunes, her heart was touched, and she begged him not to brave the perils of the sea and the wrath of Poseidon any more, but to stay with her in her lovely island.

But Odysseus longed for his home, and as soon as he had regained his strength he was anxious to set out once more. Calypso tried with all the arts she knew to induce him to stay, for day by day his wit and his wisdom made him a more delightful companion, and at length she came to love him so dearly that she felt she could not let him leave her. She pleaded and wept and devised all manner of feasting and pleasures to make Odysseus forget his home, and in this way she managed to keep him there for seven long years. Odysseus could not help loving her for her kindness and her sweetness, and he could not but enjoy the luxurious life on the island. Yet his heart was faithful to his wife Penelope, and he never ceased trying to persuade Calypso to let him return to his home.

At length, wearied and chafing at the long delay, he implored the goddess Athene, who had always been his friend, to help him. Athene persuaded Zeus to send his messenger Hermes to Calypso, bidding her allow Odysseus to depart. Very unwillingly and with many tears Calypso obeyed, and Hermes helped Odysseus to build a great raft on which to sail over the seas to his own land of grassy Ithaca.

The raft was finished and stored with food and all things necessary for the voyage, and with a favouring wind Odysseus sailed away, leaving Calypso quite heartbroken.

When Poseidon learnt that the hated Odysseus was once more on the sea and in his power, he sent a great tempest which shattered the raft and cast Odysseus into the sea. He would certainly have been drowned had not a sea-nymph who had seen and pitied him, lighted in the form of a cormorant on a floating

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spar and thrown a girdle to him, bidding him bind it about his breast.

Borne up by this girdle he floated safely on the waves, and at length landed on the Phæacian shore. He was so utterly worn out that he could only drag himself into the shelter of a wood close by the shore, and here he fell fast asleep on a bed of dry leaves.

The Phæacians were a brave and splendid race, tall and handsome, skilled in all arts, especially in building and in the management of ships, and hospitable to strangers. Their king Alcinous was wise and just, and his people loved him dearly. He had a fair young daughter named Nausicaa, and on the night before Odysseus was cast upon their shores Athene appeared before Nausicaa in a dream.

"To-morrow," she said, "go down to the river with your maidens and wash all your fine linen garments in preparation for your wedding, which is now near at hand."

It seems strange to us that a princess should be commanded to wash linen, but in those days all women, even those of the highest rank who had many handmaidens, helped in the household tasks, and the washing days, which came not every week but at long intervals, were always made into a kind of outdoor festival. So Nausicaa was not at all surprised at Athene's command, though she was startled at the goddess's words concerning her approaching marriage.

Next morning she asked her mother's permission to go with her maidens and wash the linen for the household, but she said nothing about her dream. Queen Arete gladly gave permission, and a wagon was prepared and loaded with linen, and with a good store of food and wine.

The Princess and her maidens mounted the wagon and drove merrily away. When they reached the mouth of the river, which was near the wood where Odysseus was sleeping, they unharnessed the mules and set them free to graze on the grassy banks, and then began their task. They worked with merriment and good will, singing and laughing over their labour; and, indeed, washing seemed a pleasant pastime on that summer day by the clear

Odysseus

stream, where the sun's rays shone brightly but softly through the screen of green boughs.

By noon the work was done, and the snowy linen spread out on the rocks to dry. Then the girls bathed in the stream and sat down to eat their luncheon ; and afterward they played a merry game of ball down by the sea. Then, as the afternoon waned, they took up the dry and fragrant linen and laid it in the wagon ready for the journey home.

But before they started they began to toss the ball once more in pure light-heartedness, and Nausicaa threw it so far and so swiftly that it fell into the water before anyone could stop it. Then they all cried out in laughing dismay, and the noise they made awoke Odysseus from his sleep.

He started up and peeped out through the trees, and it seemed to him that he had never seen a fairer sight than these graceful, laughing girls and their lovely Princess. He dared not venture to speak to them, for he had cast off most of his clothing when his raft had broken up, that he might swim more easily, and that which remained had been torn from him by the terrible waves. So he gathered green leafy boughs and made from them some sort of covering for his naked body, and, stepping forward, he stood before the astonished girls.

The maidens shrieked and ran away when they saw this strange figure, but the Princess stood still, and asked him calmly and kindly who he was and what he wanted. Then Odysseus told her of the shipwreck, his long swim, and his being cast upon the coast of that country ; and how he was entirely destitute, being even without clothes to cover him.

Nausicaa listened pitifully, then called her maidens and bade them bring from the wagon some of the clothes belonging to her brother. Then Odysseus went farther up the stream, bathed and dressed himself, and came back looking once more like a noble, stately Greek. Nausicaa bade him follow the wagon to the city, where she was sure her father and her mother would receive him kindly. She and her maidens took their places in the wagon, all full of curiosity concerning the stranger.

When Odysseus came to the palace of Alcinous he was

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astonished at its magnificence, and he stood for some time admiring its golden doors, the silver figures that stood in the courtyard, the gardens filled with all kinds of fruit and flowers, the wonderful fountains, the seats covered with finest needlework. Then he went on into the hall where the chiefs of the country were assembled, and, kneeling before the Queen, he said :

“ Gracious lady, a shipwrecked Greek implores your favour and your help that he may return to his own country.”

At once all the assembly looked on him with compassion. The King led him to a seat, and all listened attentively while he told the tale of his voyage from Calypso's island, his shipwreck, and his meeting with the Princess.

“ Many ships have we in Phæacia,” said Alcinous, “ and many skilled sailors. To-morrow a ship shall be made ready and manned, and in it shall you sail in safety back to Ithaca. For this night stay with us, and we will show you how we of this country honour a shipwrecked stranger.”

Now it seemed to Odysseus that at last his troubles were over, and very gratefully he accepted the hospitality of the noble Phæacians. He was lodged in the palace and treated with all courtesy, and next day a splendid feast was made in his honour. After the banquet the Princes and other noble youths began to practise the exercises and sports in which their nation was skilled—running, jumping, wrestling, throwing the quoit.

“ Will you not join in the sports of these youths ? ” asked King Alcinous courteously, but Odysseus shook his head.

“ I am growing old,” he said, “ and my limbs are stiff. I should gain little glory in competing with young men such as your noble sons.”

Still the King urged him, and the youths themselves, looking on his height and his muscular limbs, besought him to honour them by throwing the quoit in their game. So at last Odysseus rose, took a quoit much heavier than any they had used, and threw it far beyond the mark that had been reached by any of theirs. The young men looked at him in astonishment and awe, and whispered to each other : “ This is a great man, some hero who comes here in the guise of a poor wanderer.”

Odysseus

That evening in the hall Demodocus, the King's blind bard, sang to the music of his harp the lay of "The Wooden Horse," telling how Troy had been taken by the stratagem of Odysseus. It was a stirring tale, and he sang it with such fervour that the Phæacians were moved to great excitement and applauded loudly; but when they looked at the stranger they saw that tears were running down his cheeks.

Gently the King spoke: "Who are you, O wanderer," he said, "that at the tale of the taking of Troy sheds tears? Is it, perchance, that you took part in the struggle and lost there one who was dear to you—a father, brother, or friend?"

Then Odysseus stood up and spoke to them all. "Know, O King," he said, "that I am that Odysseus of whom your minstrel sang, and my tears arose because nearly ten years have passed since that glorious day and I am still far from my home."

Alcinous and his nobles, filled with surprise, hastened to pay homage to the great man whose name they all knew and revered; and they listened eagerly while he told them the story of his wanderings. Then the King suggested that since Odysseus had lost all his possessions, each of those present should make him a gift. To this they all gladly agreed, and so generous were they that the ship was loaded with treasure.

Next day Odysseus set sail, and the skilled Phæacian sailors guided the ship safely over the sea until it reached Ithaca. When it touched the strand Odysseus was sleeping, so they took him up gently and laid him down on the shore, with all his gifts beside him, and at once they sailed back to their own country.

By this time Poseidon had heard how the noble Phæacians had befriended Odysseus, and, full of wrath, the god changed the vessel that had carried the man he hated into a rock, just as it was entering the harbour, thus blocking the entrance.

But although Odysseus was now in his own loved land of Ithaca, his troubles were not quite over. When he awoke he looked round him in bewilderment, but in a few moments he recognized the country he had left so unwillingly twenty years before. As he stood considering how he should make his return known to his wife and his people, Athene, in the form of a young shepherd,

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appeared before him, and told him what had been happening in his kingdom while he had been away.

When he had not returned with the other leaders from Troy all had thought that he must be dead, and a crowd of suitors from the country round about had come to woo his wife. Penelope believed that Odysseus still lived, and refused to have anything to do with them ; but they would not be repulsed, and a hundred of them were constantly in her halls, feasting and revelling, and behaving as if they were already masters of Odysseus' house and all his possessions. It seemed to Penelope that she would be driven against her will to marry one of them, but she strove hard, and set her wits to work to gain time, hoping from day to day that she might hear news of her absent husband. She began a large and difficult piece of needlework, and told the suitors she would make her choice among them when this was finished ; and they, knowing her skill and seeing that she worked diligently for many hours each day, agreed to wait. But each night Penelope undid the stitches she had put in during the day, and so no progress was made. For three years she had managed by this device to put them off, but they had now grown impatient and suspicious, and declared they would wait no longer. Then, having tried every expedient she could think of, she had brought out her husband's bow. " I will marry," she had said, " the man who can bend this bow and send an arrow through twelve rings placed one behind the other, as Odysseus could do with ease." The suitors had agreed to this way of settling the matter, and that very day the trial was to take place.

Angrily Odysseus listened, vowing vengeance on the greedy and shameless crowd that had invaded his household and robbed his wife of her peace.

" But what of my son," he asked, " the little Telemachus whom I left a toddling babe?"

" Telemachus has grown into a brave and noble youth," answered the shepherd ; " he is not now in Ithaca, for he has gone on a journey to find his father. To-day he will arrive home, for he has managed to pass safely an ambush laid by the suitors, who wished to kill him. But now it is time you were going. You



ODYSSEUS PUNISHES THE SUITORS
T. H. Robinson

Odysseus

must not go to your house in your own person, or the suitors will be warned and flee from your vengeance. See, I will change you into an old beggarman, dirty and tattered. Go now to Eumæus the swineherd, who is loyal and faithful to all your family, and ask him to give you food and shelter."

Eumæus received the poor old man kindly, and while Odysseus was in the swineherd's hut Telemachus arrived, and came to the faithful servant for news of what had happened while he had been away. He saw the beggarman and spoke courteously to him, then sent Eumæus up to the house to tell Penelope secretly that her son had arrived.

While he was gone Odysseus, changed once more by Athene to his own form, revealed himself to Telemachus as his father. The son, almost beside himself with joy, looked on the noble Odysseus, whom he could scarcely remember, but in whose fame he had gloried, and whom he had sought long and earnestly. But there was little time to spare for rejoicing, or for talk of the past, and soon the father and son were consulting earnestly together as to how the dangers that surrounded them could best be met.

"We must be wise and cautious," said Odysseus, "or the suitors will escape us. Go you now up to the house and greet them, bearing yourself in friendly fashion toward them. Athene will change me once more to a vile beggarman, and I will come, asking for hospitality. Remember that you pay no heed to me, nor show any sign of anger, even if the suitors insult or ill-use me, for if you do our plan will miscarry."

So Telemachus went up and joined the insolent suitors in their feasting, and they pretended to be rejoiced to see him returned in safety, though secretly they were very angry that their plot to kill him had failed. Then in came Odysseus, walking feebly through his own courtyard, and past his own servants, known and greeted by none. But there was an old dog Argus who had once been his favourite hound, and his companion in many days of hunting, and who now lay in the sunshine, old and blind and very feeble. As his master's step drew near he pricked up his ears and stood erect, trying to wag his tail; but the effort

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was too great for the poor, faithful creature, and he fell dead at Odysseus' feet.

"There was one heart faithful to me," said Odysseus, and he went on into the hall, where the suitors were, as usual, feasting and rioting and treating the house as their own. The poor beggarman was allowed a lowly place in the hall, and given a portion of food; and when the feast was finished Telemachus brought out his father's bow.

He stood up stoutly and tried to draw it, but his young arm had not yet its full strength, and the bow remained unbent. Modestly Telemachus handed it to the first of the suitors. Strive as he might, the haughty noble could not bend it, and was obliged to pass it to the next; and so it went from one suitor to another, and none could send an arrow from it.

Then Odysseus came forward. "I am an old man, but in my day I was a stout warrior, and perchance even now I might find strength to draw this mighty bow."

A great uproar of mockery and laughter arose, and some cursed the old man, and some wished to scourge him for his insolence, and others to drive him from the hall. But Telemachus stepped forward.

"Let him try," he said, "in courtesy he must have his turn."

The old beggar took the bow, and stood upright. Readily and easily he bent it, and swift and true the arrow sped through all the twelve rings that had been set as a mark.

Again an uproar arose, but louder and angrier this time, and the suitors made as if they would rush upon the presumptuous beggarman. But Odysseus, again changed swiftly by Athene to his own form, turned the bow and sent an arrow through the heart of Antinous, the handsomest and most importunate of the suitors. The rest would have fled, but Telemachus closed and barred the door.

Then father and son, with Eumæus and Athene to help them, stood up against the dismayed and startled crowd of suitors. Arrow after arrow sped from the mighty bow, and a stern fight was waged, but at last all the suitors lay dead in the hall where they had been unbidden and unwelcome guests.

Odysseus

"Go fetch your mistress," Odysseus commanded, when the grim struggle was over; and one of the women hurried to Penelope, who all this time had been in her distant chamber, and knew nothing of what had been going on. Quickly she came, and the long weary time of waiting was forgotten when she saw her husband, strong and handsome as when he had left her twenty years before, standing in the hall to greet her.

So Odysseus came at last to his home.

CHAPTER II

SIGURD

THE story of Sigurd is told in the *Volsunga Saga*, an old Scandinavian heroic poem which relates the history of the Volsung family, from Sigi, son of Odin, to Sigurd, the last of his race. Just as the incidents in the *Odyssey* were gradually gathered into the tale which at length Homer enshrined in his noble poem, so the Scandinavian poet drew upon a vast wealth of oral tradition for his story. It is no less than the product of the heroic Viking mind in days before history, and it reflects the conditions of life of the early Northmen. In the *Odyssey* we see the eventual triumph of the hero over the difficulties which man and Nature—represented by various deities—place in his path, and we leave the great-hearted Odysseus to enjoy the placid evening of his days. It is far different with the *Volsunga Saga*; throughout the warp and woof of the story a dark thread of tragedy guides us to a climax of disaster and woe.

The reason for this great difference may be found in the circumstances of the two peoples. For the Greek, life was comparatively easy; he basked in the rays of a sun which made his fields fruitful and enabled him to enjoy Nature with little effort; to him Nature was friend and intimate companion. To the Norseman, on the other hand, Nature presented a very different aspect. The winter days were long and wild; the brief spring and summer were all too short, and men must strive earnestly against odds to win their livelihood. This was the urge which sent the Viking far afield to other more fruitful lands, and which made his dragon-ships a presage of terror to dwellers on the coasts of Britain.

Sigurd, or Siegfried, is the favourite hero of the northern nations, and his story has deeply influenced their literature. In the Middle Ages German poets wrote many ballads which became

Sigurd

national treasures, and these were at last collected by an unknown poet in the *Nibelungenlied*. They also inspired the wonderful stories which Richard Wagner wrote for his four great operas of *The Ring*. One of the finest epic poems in English literature, written by William Morris, is a retelling of the great story of the North, "which," wrote Morris, "should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks."

FAR away in the cold Northland lived the Viking Elf, with his beautiful young wife, Hiordis, and his little stepson, Sigurd. Sigurd could not remember his own father, but his mother had told him many tales about her famous first husband, Sigmund, King of the Huns. The little boy knew that his father had been of the valiant Volsung race, and had done marvellous deeds to win back the kingdom which had been taken by treachery from his line. "He was old when he wooed me for his wife," Hiordis would say to the little lad, who looked up eagerly into her face, listening intently to the story he had often heard before, "and I was a young maiden, and many other suitors had sought me in marriage. Yet was I glad and proud to marry the hero whose name was honoured through all the realms of the Norsemen. Alas ! that by marrying him I brought him to his death."

Here her tears would fall fast, and scarce, for grief, could she tell the rest of the story—how Lygni, King of the Hundings, who had been one of her suitors, had brought a great army against Sigmund ; how the old hero and his followers, though they were hopelessly outnumbered, had fought until the bodies of their enemies lay in heaps around them ; how, at last, each had received his death-wound ; how she herself, with one handmaiden, had watched the battle from a thicket, and had come out when her husband lay dying on the ground, and listened to his last words ; how he had given her the fragments of his shattered sword, bidding her save them for his son ; and how, while she wept over his lifeless body, a band of Vikings had suddenly appeared.

"Tall and fierce they looked," she said, "but they spoke good and courteous words ; and when I told my story, Elf, their leader, who is now your kind father, offered me his help, saying he would

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take me and my handmaiden to his home beyond the seas, where we should be safe from our enemies. Very willingly we agreed to go with him, for Lygni's men were searching the battle-field for Sigmund's body, and if we stayed we must fall into their hands. So we came to this northern land, and here we have dwelt in safety; and in gratitude and love I gave my hand to Elf when he entreated me, and he has been ever a good husband



HIORDIS AND SIGURD

to me and a kind father to you, my little Sigurd, who owe him loyal duty and service. Yet must you never forget your own father, who died with your name upon his lips. He told me with his last breath that you, his son, would be greater than he, and that the fame of your deeds should spread through all lands."

Then the little lad would lift his golden head proudly, and his childish hand would grasp an imaginary sword at his side. "I will never forget that I am Sigmund's son," he would shout. Then, seeing his mother's smile, so tender and sad and loving, he

Sigurd

would throw himself into her arms, and tell her not to be unhappy, for he was growing big and strong, and would soon be able to avenge his father's wrongs.

So the years went on, and it was time for little Sigurd to learn those arts and accomplishments in which a high-born Norseman must needs be skilled. The good stepfather, Elf, chose the boy's tutor very carefully. Among his followers was an old man named Regin—a man so old that none could say when his years had begun. He had taught Elf and his father and his grandfather. He understood all lore of speech, and could speak wisely on any subject. He was skilled in music and leech-craft, and in the carving of runes and magic spells. He was master of smith-craft, and could fashion most wonderful weapons for those whom he wished to help.

To Regin Elf sent the stepson whom he had always loved and cared for as if he had been his own ; and the tall stripling, sturdy and upright, with his fearless blue eyes and proud bearing, came daily to the little wizened, bent old man in whom dwelt the wisdom of the ages. But Sigurd did not know, and Elf did not know, how black and wicked was the heart that beat in that meagre form, nor what cruel plans lay hidden in the subtle brain. Regin looked on Sigurd and saw in him the tool he had been patiently looking for through long, long years to work out his own wicked purposes. He made up his mind that he would win the lad's loyalty and devotion, so that when the time came he could use him as he willed.

Day by day Sigurd came to Regin, and the old man taught him diligently ; and Elf, seeing that the boy was rapidly becoming skilled in the arts needful for a king's son, was content. All that his stepson required he gladly gave him, and when Sigurd, prompted by Regin, asked for a horse, Elf bade him go to Gripir, the keeper of the royal stables, and choose from the horses in his charge the one that pleased him best.

Gripir led the youth to the meadow where the horses were at pasture. There were so many of them, and all looked such noble, beautiful creatures, that it was very difficult to make a choice. Sigurd stood looking at them, unable to make up his mind, when

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he noticed an old one-eyed man, wrapped in a coat of grey and blue, standing beside him.

"Drive all the horses into the river," said the stranger, "and choose the one that most easily breasts the tide."

The advice seemed good to the perplexed youth, and he followed it gladly. He drove all the horses toward the stream that flowed along one side of the meadow and watched them plunge in and swim across. All reached the other side without difficulty; but one, as soon as his feet touched the bank, bounded forward, raced round the meadow which lay beyond, then plunged into the stream again and swam gleefully back.

"That is the horse that shall be mine," cried Sigurd, turning to the stranger at his side; but the old, one-eyed man had disappeared. Sigurd did not know that it was Odin, chief of the Norsemen's gods, who often took this form as he went in and out among men. Nor did he know that the horse he had chosen, and which he named Greyfell, was a descendant of Odin's eight-footed horse, Sleipnir. From that day Sigurd and Greyfell were constant companions. Never was there a swifter or a stronger steed, nor one more fearless and faithful; never was there a braver or kinder master. In all the adventures the two undertook together never one failed the other.

Sigurd had now grown to be a young man, and Regin saw that the time had come when he might be used for the purpose his cunning tutor had so long had in mind. So one winter evening, as they sat by the fire, the old man took his harp and sang, after the manner of the northern minstrels, a lay of wonder and adventure. It was a long lay, too long to be given here, and it told the story of Hreidmar, king of the dwarfs. Hreidmar had three sons, Fafnir, Otter, and Regin. The second of these, who had the power of changing his form at will, was killed, as he lay in the sun in the likeness of an otter, by Loki, the god of fire; and in recompense for his son's murder Hreidmar obtained from Loki a vast treasure-hoard taken from the dwarf Andvari. This hoard contained, besides a countless store of gold and gems, the Helmet of Dread, which had all sorts of magic powers, and a ring which acted as a magnet to all gold anywhere near it. Both Hreidmar's

Sigurd

remaining sons, Fafnir and Regin, coveted this hoard, but Fafnir, being the strongest, gained it. He slew his father, and drove his brother scornfully away, bidding him go work for his living ; and then he took the treasure and bore it away to a great desert, which was called Gnitahaid or Glittering Heath. He spent all his time gloating over it and making himself as fierce and terrible as he could so that none might dare to approach him ; and this he did through long years, until at last he turned into a horrible and loathsome dragon.

When the old man had finished his lay he turned to his pupil.

"This is my own story," he said. "I am Regin, the son of Hreidmar. I have lived in poverty and sorrow for many years, and I have none but you whom I can ask to right my wrong. Will you help me to avenge my father? The treasure shall be yours, and you will be greater and richer than all the kings of the earth."

The brave and tender heart of Sigurd was touched by his old tutor's piteous tale, and fired at the thought of an adventure which, it seemed to him, was worthy of the son of Sigmund.

"I will help you," he said ; "but first I must avenge the death of my own father, as I have promised my mother that I will do. And if I am to fight I shall need a sword, and you must make me one that cannot be broken however hard may be the blow."

So Regin set to work, and with his wonderful smith-craft he fashioned a sword which he believed no blow could break. But when Sigurd tried it on the anvil, at the first stroke it was shattered into many pieces.

"You must try once more," said Sigurd, and again Regin set to work. This time he wrought with double care, putting all his skill and all his strength into the making of a sword such as he had never made before.

"Try this," he said to Sigurd, and the young man took the marvellous weapon in his hand and looked at it in delight and wonder, for he had never before seen a sword so keen and strong and of such a fine temper.

"Surely no blow can harm such a blade as this," he cried joyously, and raising it he struck with all his might on Regin's

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anvil. There was a clash and the sound of falling fragments. The blade lay shattered at his feet.

"'Tis of no use," said Regin, in angry despair. "I can do no better than I have done already. That sword was my masterpiece."

For a moment the two stood looking sorrowfully down on the fragments. Then suddenly a thought struck Sigurd and he cried out :



REGIN SETS TO WORK AGAIN

"My father's sword ! My mother has told me how when he was dying he gave her the broken blade and bade her save it for me. Wait but a moment !"

Quickly Sigurd found his mother and told his tale, and she looked at him proudly and sadly, realizing that he was now indeed a man, and that the time had come when he must go out and fight, as his father had done before him. She fetched the fragments she had treasured and gave them to him.

"Go, my son," she said, "and may Odin, who gave this



ODIN COUNSELS SIGURD
J. C. Dollman



SIGURD SLAYS THE CRAFTY REGIN

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Sigurd

matchless sword to your father, meet you in the way and strengthen your arm."

Once more Regin set to work, casting the pieces of Sigmund's sword into his furnace and fashioning from them a new blade. This time little labour was needed. The sword seemed to grow of itself, and when it was finished it might have been the very weapon of Sigmund that Sigurd held in his hand. Once more he struck upon the anvil, and this time the solid iron fell apart, cut clean through, while the sword remained undented.

"I must show this to Elf," cried the delighted youth, and away he ran to find his stepfather. As he went he saw a bunch of wool floating upon a stream. "See!" he cried, and with the finely tempered blade he easily divided the light, fleecy mass in two. "With a sword such as this in my hand," he cried, "I can do anything."

So Sigurd bade his mother and his stepfather farewell, and he and Regin sailed in one of Elf's dragon-ships to the land of the Volsungs, where Lygni still reigned in the kingdom that he had treacherously taken from Sigmund. On the way they saw a man, old and with only one eye, walking to them upon the water. Sigurd took the man on board, not guessing that it was Odin himself, and from the stranger he learnt many things—how to read signs and omens, and how to escape the dangers of the sea.

At last they reached the land of the Volsungs, and after much fighting Sigurd slew Lygni, and the people gladly welcomed him back to his father's throne. But he could not stay long in his new-won country, for he had vowed to Regin that next he would slay the dragon Fafnir. So the two sailed away again to Regin's country, and there they rode many miles along a wild mountain path until they came to a great desert.

"This is Glittering Heath," said Regin, "and yonder is the dragon's lair. Go you forward and meet him, while I await you here."

Then Sigurd rode forward, pondering as to how he should set about his difficult task.

"Look on yonder river," said a voice at his side, and Sigurd turning quickly, saw the one-eyed stranger once more. "Every

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day the beast you have come to kill drags its loathsome body down to these waters to drink. Dig then a deep trench in the middle of the track, and hide yourself within it, and when his great body lies across the top of the trench thrust your sword into his heart."

The old man spoke and disappeared; and Sigurd, guessing that it was a divine voice that had spoken to him, gladly followed the advice it had given. His good blade pierced the dragon's heart, and, leaping from the trench, Sigurd saw him lying in a great pool of blood, quite dead.

Regin from afar off had anxiously watched the young hero's attack. Now he came quickly forward, with joy in his heart; but his face, according to the cunning plan he had long had in his head, he made to look very stern.

"You have killed one of my kin," he said to Sigurd, "for yonder dragon was my brother, and by the law of the Norsemen your life is forfeit to me." Then seeing Sigurd's look of astounded bewilderment he went on, "But I will not claim the uttermost penalty. Let it suffice for your atonement that you take the dragon's heart from his body and roast it on a spit and bring it to me that I may eat of it and gain some of the hoarded knowledge and wisdom that belonged to Fafnir."

Then Sigurd remembered the law of the Norsemen which said that whoever should slay a man must recompense his kinsmen. So, believing that Regin, in kindness of heart, had chosen this easy way for him to fulfil his obligation, he cheerfully set himself to do what was asked of him. Soon the dragon's heart was roasting on the spit, and Sigurd, drawing near to tend the fire, accidentally touched the heart with his fingers. Quickly he put them in his mouth to ease the smart, and instantly he felt that some change had come over him. Standing quite still he tried to understand what had happened, and as he stood he heard two little birds twittering to each other near by. To his surprise he found that he could understand what they were saying.

"Who will warn this poor boy," said one of the birds, "that the wicked Regin means to kill him and take the treasure-hoard for himself? 'Tis thus he has planned to act all through the long

Sigurd

years that Sigurd has looked upon him as a wise and loving teacher."

"How can we save him from this wicked man?" said the other in great distress. "Who will tell him that this Regin is a monster worse than Fafnir himself, and that his hidden deeds have been so evil that to rid the world of him were an action worthy of a hero such as the son of Sigmund must be? Who will show this man as he really is to the youth who believes him to be the best and wisest of mankind?"

"The boy is roasting the dragon's heart for the vile old man," said another bird, flying up, "and when he has eaten it he will be a thousand times more cunning and apt to work mischief than he was before. If Sigurd would only kill him and eat the dragon's heart himself, he would be able to do such mighty deeds that his name would be famous and blessed through all the world."

"Strike, Sigurd, strike!" sang all the birds together, as they hovered over his head; and Sigurd, moved as it seemed to him by some power that he could not resist, turned and thrust his sword into the body of the old man who was watching with greedy eyes the meal that was preparing for him. Without a cry Regin fell dead, and Sigurd, still moved by the spirit that had led him thus to slay his master, took the dragon's heart from the spit and sat down to eat a portion of it.

As he ate he listened to the birds who were still hovering near. They were talking now of a maiden named Brunhild. She had been a Valkyr, they said, one of Odin's warrior-maidens, whose duty it was to watch over the contests of men, and give victory as Odin decreed. She had, the birds said, disobeyed Odin on one occasion and had given the victory to a brave young warrior whom he had willed should be defeated. To punish her for this Odin had decreed that she should become a mortal maiden and take a mortal husband. Brunhild, fearing that she might have to marry a coward, had besought the Allfather to save her from so terrible a fate; and Odin, granting her prayer, had carried her to the top of a mountain and had set round her as a barrier a ring of leaping flames. "He who comes to you here you must take for a husband," the Allfather had said, "and needs must he

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be a brave man, for none other would pass through the fire with which I have surrounded you." Then he had touched her with the thorn of sleep, and she had sunk peacefully down to wake only when some hero should dare the terror of the flames and come to her in her lonely resting-place.

As Sigurd listened his heart leapt for joy. "This is the adventure for me!" he cried; "better than the gaining of treasure or the slaying of monsters will be the rousing of such a maiden and the winning of her for my wife."

He sprang to his feet, and carefully packed up the portion of the dragon's heart that he had not eaten. Then he sought out the treasure-hoard, put on the Helmet of Dread, the Hauberk of Gold and the ring Andvaranaut, loaded Greyfell with as much of the gold and gems as he could carry, and set out on his adventure.

A long, long way he travelled through barren, desolate places, until at last one night he came to the mountain of the Hindarfiall. It stood like a great torch, with a ring of flames leaping up round its summit, and he knew that he had found the place he had come to seek.

Gallantly Greyfell toiled up the mountain side, and at every step the flames grew clearer and brighter, and the two travellers could hear the loud roar with which they mounted towards heaven. At last, as dawn was breaking, the top of the mountain was reached, and Sigurd stood before the fiery barrier through which he must force his way. It seemed impossible even to approach those terrible flames without being scorched and shrivelled.

"And yet," said Sigurd to himself, "the birds said it was destined that someone should pass to the maiden, and why not I as well as another? On, my brave Greyfell!"

The horse, fearless as his master, dashed into the flames. Round them the tongues of fire swept and curled, high above them they leapt till horse and rider were wrapped and shrouded in the glowing splendour of their blinding light. "On!" still cried Sigurd, and Greyfell obeyed his voice. On! until the barrier was passed, and the two, breathless, but with no mark of fire upon them, stood safely on the mountain-top, and looked round at a ring of smoking ashes, quickly fading into grey.

Sigurd

The danger was over, and eagerly Sigurd began his search for the resting-place of the sleeping maiden. He saw before him a noble castle, whose gates stood wide and unguarded. He entered and passed into the courtyard. There, in the centre, lay a sleeping form, but this he thought could not be the maiden he sought, for it was cased in armour. He dismounted from Greyfell, and bending over the sleeping figure removed the helmet. Then



SIGURD BRAVES THE FLAMES

he started back in surprise. The face he saw was that of a beautiful girl; the eyes were closed, but the soft breathing and the faintly flushed cheeks showed that she was not dead, only sleeping very peacefully and sweetly.

Sigurd tried to rouse her, but in vain. At last he unfastened her armour and gently removed it from her still form. As he did so the first rays of the morning sun broke through the grey morning mist. The girl opened her eyes; dark, beautiful eyes such as Sigurd had never seen before. A moment of wonder

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and consternation, and then she sprang to her feet, a lovely maiden with long, golden hair and flowing garments of pure, white linen. She looked first toward the rising sun, then turned and gazed on the youth who had fulfilled Odin's prediction and had come through the fire to wake her. As her eyes met his there sprang up in her heart a great love for this tall, fair-haired stripling with his brave blue eyes; and Sigurd,



SIGURD AND BRUNHILD PLIGHT THEIR TROTH

looking on her lovely face, felt that here was the one maiden for him.

So they talked together, and Brunhild told Sigurd her story, and Sigurd told Brunhild how it was that he had come to find her in her mountain hiding-place. Then they plighted their troth to each other, and Sigurd put the ring Andvaranaut on the maiden's finger.

"And now," he said, "for this time I must not stay, but I will come to you again when I have fulfilled my duty as a young knight and won the right to woo a maiden for my wife. Will

Sigurd

you come with me now to my mother, or will you await me here ? ”

“ I will await you here,” said Brunhild, “ where Odin has placed me.” Then Sigurd swore that he would come again as soon as he had accomplished his tasks, and they parted. Brunhild fell once more into her magic sleep, and Sigurd took his way down the mountain side. Turning, he saw the ring of flames spring up behind him, and he knew that his love was safely guarded until he could come to her again.

Many brave deeds he wrought, and travelled far through the world, until at last he came to the land of the Niblungs, here reigned a king named Giuki, with Grimhild, his Queen. They received the young man, now grown into a tried and practised warrior, with great kindness, and he helped the King in a war that was then being fought against the enemies of the Niblungs. So valiant did he show himself that Grimhild thought that no other warrior she had seen was so worthy to be the husband of her only daughter, the lovely and gentle Gudrun. Grimhild knew that Sigurd’s heart was wholly given to another maiden, for she was skilled in magic, and could read much of what was hidden in men’s minds. One day, therefore, she brewed a magic potion and gave it to Sigurd ; and as he drank of it all memory of Brunhild and his troth-plight passed from him and was as if it had never been. He looked with eyes of love on Gudrun and desired her for his wife. Very happily went his wooing, and soon he had married Gudrun, and was living, honoured and beloved, as a prince among the Niblungs.

Gudrun had three brothers, Gunnar, Högni, and Guttorm, and these all welcomed Sigurd and desired to bind him to them as one of their blood and family. So, according to the custom of the Norsemen, the young men entered the “ doom-ring ” together. They cut a sod from the earth and placed it upon a shield, and beneath this shield they stood while they bared and slightly cut their right arms so that their blood flowed down and mingled in the fresh, uncovered earth below. Then when they had sworn eternal friendship they replaced the sod.

But although Sigurd was very happy with his wife and his

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friends, there were times when a vague misgiving possessed him. Memories that he could not grasp seemed to float about him, and he felt a haunting fear that somehow things were not as they seemed. His face lost some of its brightness, and though he was always cheerful and kindly, he was not the light-hearted Sigurd that once he had been. Gudrun too was changed. Her husband wishing to share with her the gifts that had come to him through eating the dragon's heart, gave her some of the portion which he still carefully guarded; and after she had tasted it she grew silent and cold, showing little of her old love and tenderness to any of her family, but caring only for her husband.

So time went on until the old King Giuki died, and his eldest son, Gunnar, reigned in his stead. The young King was unwedded, and Grimhild, his mother, besought him to take a wife. She told him the story which had now become widely known, of how on the top of Mount Hindarfiall, Brunhild, the warrior-maiden, lay in a deep sleep, waiting for the chosen knight to come and wake her. Gunnar's imagination was fired at the story, as Sigurd's had been before him, and at once he was eager to set out on the adventure. He begged his brother-in-law to go with him, and Sigurd, with no recollection of the time when he himself had gone on the same quest, willingly agreed.

Grimhild gave her son a magic potion to be used in case of need, and Sigurd wore his wonder-working Helmet of Dread. They reached the mountain, and came to the ring of flames which rose high and terrible as ever. Nothing daunted, Gunnar urged his horse toward them, but the frightened beast drew back, and nothing his master could do would persuade him to approach the flames. In his disappointment Gunnar called to Sigurd.

"Greyfell shows no sign of fear," he said, "let me mount him, since my own coward beast will not be persuaded."

Willingly Sigurd agreed, and the exchange of steeds was made. But now Greyfell refused to move, and not all Gunnar's efforts could bring him one step nearer the ring of fire.

"I see what it is," said Sigurd, "he will not obey any hand but his master's. Let us think now what we can do."

So they consulted together, and soon they hit upon a plan. By

Sigurd

means of the magic potion and the Helmet of Dread they exchanged their outward appearances, so that Gunnar took the form of Sigurd and Sigurd appeared as Gunnar. Then the seeming Gunnar mounted Greyfell, who, undeceived by the outward change, was obedient, as always, to his hand.

Through the flames dashed the horse and rider, and soon came upon Brunhild seated in the great hall of the castle. Neither knew the other, Sigurd because of the potion of forgetfulness that he had drunk, Brunhild because the form of Sigurd was changed to that of Gunnar. As Gunnar he wooed her, and though she still loved with all her heart her first lover, yet she was bound by her obedience to Odin to accept as her husband he who came to her through the ring of fire. For three days Sigurd remained with her, and not once in that time did any memory of the past come back to him, and not once did he by a careless word make her suspect he was not in truth the King Gunnar whom he seemed.

On the fourth morning as he was about to leave her he drew the ring Andvaranaut from Brunhild's hand, giving her in its place one which Gunnar had entrusted to him.

"Promise me," he said, "that in ten days' time you will come to the court of the Niblungs prepared to wed me and live with me as my queen."

"I promise," replied Brunhild, for she dared not refuse, though her heart was breaking for the lover who had ridden away and had not come back.

Then Sigurd returned to Gunnar, and each took again his own shape and features, and together they went back to their home to await the coming of Brunhild. Only to Gudrun did Sigurd tell the story of how he, in her brother's form, had wooed her brother's bride, and to Gudrun he gave the ring Andvaranaut, remembering nothing of its former history.

On the tenth day, faithful to her promise, Brunhild came. Gunnar met her with all ceremony and respect at the entrance to his castle, and led her to the great hall, where, among the rest of the royal family, Sigurd sat with Gudrun at his side. At once she recognized him, and as her reproachful eyes met his the power of Gunhild's magic potion was destroyed and all the past came

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back to him. His love for Brunhild rose strong as ever, and the affection he had felt for Gudrun faded away.

But it was too late now to fulfil his old promise and claim Brunhild as his bride. The unhappy lovers must hide their feelings as best they could, and see that neither Gunnar nor Gudrun guessed their secret. Sorrow made Sigurd kinder and more loving to those about him, more anxious to serve others, more anxious to right such wrongs as could be righted and save others from such a fate as had fallen upon himself. But Brunhild grew ever more restless and discontented ; sometimes her sorrow seemed more than she could bear, and then she would go out into the forest and weep and sob and bemoan her cruel fortune. To Gunnar she was cold and unloving ; and he, seeing her sad looks and the scant return she made for all the love and care he showed her, began to wonder whether Sigurd had played him false, and during those three days spent within the ring of fire had wooed Brunhild for himself and not for his friend.

Gudrun, too, was not very happy, for a vague jealousy of Brunhild tormented her ; and by and by a feeling of great bitterness grew up between these two women, who both loved Sigurd. At last there came a day when the ill-will broke out in an open quarrel. The two Queens, with their trains, went down to bathe in the waters of the Rhine, and each claimed precedence of the other.

"My husband is the bravest of any in the land," declared Gudrun ; "he has proved his courage, and men give him always the highest place among them. Therefore it is my right to go down before you."

"Not so," replied Brunhild. "I am the wife of the King of this land, and no other woman can come before me."

At last in anger Gudrun drew forth the ring Andvaranaut that Sigurd had given her. "This ring my husband received from you. 'Twas a troth-plight from some suitor to whom you had proved faithless before you saw my brother."

The sight of this ring in Gudrun's hand pierced Brunhild to the heart. Sigurd, she thought, must have betrayed her, and told his wife her unhappy story. She went back to the palace



SIGURD
From a statue by Gilbert Bayes



FAREWELL TO SIGURD !
J. C. Dollman

Sigurd

almost mad with shame and misery, and shutting herself up in her room, refused to speak to her husband or to any of those who came anxiously seeking to know what was amiss.

Day after day she lay there, until all feared she would die. At last Sigurd came, and at the sight of him all her anger and shame and misery burst forth. She spoke harsh words, reproaching him for breaking faith with her, and bringing her to a life of misery in this loveless marriage; and he, stricken with pity and remorse, offered to put away Gudrun and take Brunhild for his wife. But she would not listen to this proposal, and drove him away, saying that she could not be faithless to Gunnar.

When he had gone pride and shame so mounted within her that she felt she hated the man whom before she had so dearly loved, and she sent for Gunnar and begged him to bring about Sigurd's death, saying that she hated him and could not be happy while he was always in her sight. But Gunnar replied that he had stood in the doom-ring with Sigurd and could not break his oath of fellowship. Then Brunhild sent for Högni and begged him to carry out her will; but he, too, refused to break his oath. He promised, however, that he would prevail upon Guttorm, the third brother, who had not taken the oath of fellowship, to bring about the death of Sigurd.

Guttorm at first refused to do the dastardly deed, but Högni obtained a magic potion from his mother, and by the help of this he prevailed upon his brother to undertake to murder the unsuspecting Sigurd.

At dead of night Guttorm stole to the room where Sigurd slept, but as he was about to strike he saw his brother-in-law's shining eyes fixed upon him, and he fled in terror. After a time he came again, but again fled before that calm, clear gaze. Then he waited until the night had almost passed, and when he stole once more to the bedside Sigurd was asleep. Guttorm drove his sword through the hero's back and turned to fly, but Sigurd, raising himself with a last effort of strength, threw his spear at his murderer. It passed through Guttorm's body, cutting it in two.

Then Sigurd turned to Gudrun, who had awakened in terror to find her brother dead and her husband dying.

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"Farewell," he whispered; "I go to the Allfather, and the deeds that I have done remain"; and he sank back and died.

Terrible were the grief and anger of the Niblungs when they heard of the foul deed that had been done. All had loved Sigurd, who had served his wife's country with unselfish devotion, and now from all parts of the land came mourners to his funeral. They built a mighty pyre and brought offerings of the most precious things they possessed; and then the body of Sigurd, wearing shining armour and with the Helmet of Dread upon his head, was brought out and laid upon the pyre. Greyfell, his faithful steed, was to be burned with him, and was finely arrayed, like his master.

Gudrun mourned for her husband with bitter tears. Brunhild, who had believed she hated Sigurd, now that he was dead felt all her love for him return. She came to look at him as he lay upon the pyre, and it seemed to her that at that moment her heart broke so that she could live no longer. She went back to her room and distributed all her possessions among her handmaidens. Then she arrayed herself in her richest attire, and stretching herself upon her bed, thrust a dagger into her heart.

The tidings of what she had done were carried by her terrified maidens to Gunnar. He came in haste, and was in time to receive her last words. She begged that her body might be laid on the pyre beside Sigurd and burnt with his, and the heartbroken Gunnar promised that this should be done. Faithfully he kept his word, and the two unhappy lovers, whom Fate had divided in life, in death were together.

CHAPTER III

CUCHULAIN

THE difference between the Northern and the Celtic nations is clearly illustrated when we turn from the stories of Sigurd and Beowulf to the stories of Cuchulain and Finn. There is a lightness and grace in these Irish tales which is not to be found in those of the Saxon. They are full of imagination and of poetry ; they are changeful, passing from a dark stern mood to one of mirth or of tenderness. They have more incident and a quicker movement than the stories of the Northern races, and though the Irish heroes fight as fiercely and work as much destruction as the Norse or Saxon, they do it in less dark and direful fashion.

The story of Cuchulain probably took shape about the beginning of the Christian era, though the earliest written copies that have come down to us date from the eleventh or twelfth century. Before this time the lays were handed down by the bards, who sang them at feasts in great men's houses, and during this period many alterations and additions were made to them. So that we may believe that the tale of Cuchulain as we have it now represents the ideal hero of the people of Ireland during the first twelve centuries of our era—nearly the same period as that during which Beowulf was the hero of the Saxons, though beginning probably a little earlier.

Cuchulain is the great champion who upheld the North against the South. He was a boy when he did most of his great deeds, and the whole story is a story of youth and life, representative of a race which has a quick, almost restless vitality in place of the sturdy strength of the Saxon.

LONG, long ago, in the year that our Lord was born, there lived in Ireland, in the kingdom of Ulster, a warrior named Sualtach, who had a little son called Setanta. He was a very

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beautiful little boy, tall and strong, with fair hair and blue eyes and a noble bearing. He had for his foster-father Fergus, who was the deposed King of Ulster, and it was said that he was under the special guardianship of Lugh of the Long Arms, God of Light.

When Setanta was about four years old there came to his home a warrior who was travelling toward King Conor's palace in Emain Macha. He told the boy many tales of the King's Court; and especially of the Boy-corps that Conor had established. In this corps boys of noble birth were trained, he said, in all the arts that would help them to grow up strong and brave. The most famous chieftains in Ulster were their teachers, and the King himself often came to watch them as they played their games and wrestled and threw the javelin or practised with the sword and spear. When any boy reached a certain standard of skill and strength the King gave him a set of war gear and weapons, alike, except in size, to those of a grown warrior.

"I will go too," at once cried little Setanta, "for I can wrestle and throw the javelin. Let me go to Emain Macha, for I too will be one of the Boy-corps."

But his mother said that he was too young, that he must wait until he was twelve, or ten at the least, for all the boys in the corps were much older than he. To none of this would Setanta listen. In imagination he had seen that happy band of boy warriors, and he was on fire to be one of them.

"Only tell me the way," he said, "and I will set out"; and when they told him it was a long and weary way over the mountains he was not a bit dismayed.

"In which direction does the palace lie?" he asked, and they told him toward the north-west.

So the boy, only waiting to gather up his silver ball, with the brass hurley he used to strike it, and his javelin, and his toy spear, set off by himself, full of hope and excitement. It was a long way, but Setanta did not find it wearisome, for he played a game which took him quickly over the ground. First he struck his ball with the hurley, sending it a great distance; then he threw the hurley after it, as far again; then, running all the time, cast first his javelin and then his spear, picked up ball, hurley, and

Cuchulain

javelin, and was in time to catch the spear before it reached the ground.

At length he came near Emain Macha, and there in a fair green field he saw the Boy-corps at play. There were a hundred and fifty of them, and their leader was Follaman, a younger son of King Conor. They were playing a game of hurley, in which each tried with his stick to drive the ball over the goal. For a few minutes Setanta watched this company of straight and well-grown lads as they ran and shouted and struck mightily at the ball, and he thought he had never seen such a merry game or such splendid boys. The longing to join them soon grew so strong that he rushed forward into the midst of the throng, seized the ball and placed it between his knees, then, working it up and down from his knees to his ankles so that not one of the boys could get a hit at it, he made his way down the field until he was near the goal, and then with one great stroke he sent the ball over.

But to his surprise, instead of applauding his stroke, the boys cried out in violent anger.

"Who is this," shouted Follaman, "who dares, uninvited, to push himself into the midst of our game? It is an insult that an unknown boy should join himself to our noble band. Punish him, uphold your honour and the honour of your corps."

The enraged boys gathered round Setanta and, all at once, threw their toy spears at him, but he caught them all on his little shield. Then they threw their hurley sticks, and these he caught in bundles on his back ; and the balls he received on his arms and hands, and then gathered them into his bosom.

By this time he had begun to realize that the boys were not in sport, but were bent on doing him real harm. Then a great anger came on him. His eyes gleamed strangely, he seemed to grow bigger and more terrible-looking. Like a young lion he leapt into the midst of his foes, striking right and left. Soon fifty of them were lying on the ground, and the rest running in terror toward the palace.

After them rushed Setanta, so furious that he did not see a table set in the open air where King Conor and his own foster-

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father Fergus were playing chess. The King caught him by the arm, speaking kindly to him, and the little boy poured out all his tale of the ill-treatment he had received when he sought for comradeship.

"What is your name, little one?" asked the King, and Setanta told him. "Did you not know," went on Conor, "the rule of the Boy-corps which says that a newcomer must put himself under the protection of the rest, that his life may be respected?"

"I did not know," said the boy; "take me under your protection, O King."

The boy's fearless speech, his open face, and his noble bearing won the King's heart, and he promised that he would be his protector. Then he called the boys together and presented their new comrade to them, and bound them to treat him well.

So the game began anew. But soon Setanta had again laid fifty of his comrades on the ground, and the King called to him.

"This is not well," said Conor. "What are you doing now?"

"You bound them not to treat me ill," said the boy, "but you did not ask for my protection toward them."

"I do so now," said the King, smiling to himself at the boy's pride.

"I will give it," cried Setanta joyously, and after that there was no more trouble. He was far stronger and more skilful than any of his comrades; he could hold the goal with his stick against the whole hundred and fifty of them, or he could drive in his ball though all the hundred and fifty strove to prevent him. But he was so brave and merry, such a true comrade and gallant fighter, so free from boasting, and so ready to help any who needed help, that the others very soon loved him well, and were content to own him as their superior. The King took great pride in him, and often came to watch him at his games in the playing-field. "This boy will be a great warrior when he is grown," said Conor; "he will fight for Ulster and serve her well."

It was the King's custom to visit in turn such of his subjects as were able to entertain him and were anxious for the honour of doing so, and one day he set out for the house of a famous

Cuchulain

smith and artificer, whose name was Culain. When he was ready to start he called Setanta from his game and bade him come with the royal party, but the boy asked leave first to finish his game.

"But we shall have started before then, and you will not be able to find your way," said Conor.

"I will follow your tracks," answered Setanta; "you will see that it will all be right." So the King trusted the marvellous boy, and the royal party set out.

They reached Culain's house, where they found everything prepared. There was a huge fire in the middle of the hall, and a great barrel of ale standing near the door. At the fire Culain's servants were cooking the meat on wooden spits, and such a savoury smell went up that the hungry guests made haste to sit down.

Before the feast began Culain came to King Conor and asked him if all his party had arrived, or if he expected others.

"I have," he explained, "a great hound, very strong and savage, and him I will loose to guard the house if all are within. But if there are more to come I will keep him on his chain, for he will certainly kill any intruder."

"Set the hound loose," said Conor, "we are all here." This he said forgetting about Setanta.

So Culain unloosed the great dog; it rushed round the house and court, and then sat down before the front door with its eyes on the road beyond.

The feast began, but before long it was interrupted by a loud howl from the dog outside, so menacing and terrible that the faces of those seated at the table went white with horror. Then suddenly the King remembered the boy and cried out that it was he who stood outside, having promised to follow.

Up started the warriors, all fear forgotten; they flung open the door and rushed out. There stood the little lad, his hand on the great head of the hound, who lay dead before him. A loud outcry arose. "How is this?" "What have you done?" "Who has killed the hound?" shouted one after another.

The boy answered very calmly: "He rushed at me, and I

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threw my ball into his mouth, and as he tried to swallow it I seized his jaw and the back of his head and dashed it against the door-post."

Then Fergus swung the boy on his shoulder and carried him in triumph to the King, while everybody exclaimed in wonder and admiration.

But Culain's face was clouded.



CUCHULAIN SLAYS THE GREAT HOUND

"It was well for you, little boy, that you killed my hound," he said, "but for me it is hard fortune. Who will guard my land and my cattle and the land and the cattle of all my neighbours now he is dead?"

The child was sorry when he heard the smith's complaint, but after a moment he answered eagerly :

"If there is a whelp of this dog's breed to be found in Ireland I will get it for you to recompense you for the deed I have done, and I will train it up so that it will take the place of the one you

Cuchulain

have lost. And until that time I myself will guard your fields and your cattle. I will be your hound."

The warriors standing by cried out in approval. "Henceforth we will call you not 'Setanta' but 'Cu-Chulain,' the hound of Culain!" they cried.

But this did not please the boy, and he said decidedly, "No, I will be Setanta."

"Nay, take the name 'Cuchulain,'" ¹ said a magician who was among the company, "for by that name you shall hereafter be known throughout all the world, and your praise shall be in all men's mouths."

"Then I am content," said the boy.

From that time forth he was called Cuchulain, and later, when he had done good service for his country, men loved to speak of him as the Hound of Ulster, he who guarded the land from her foes.

Not long after this Cuchulain was playing one day outside the place where Caffa, the magician, was teaching the elder boys their lessons. He was telling them which were the lucky days for special acts, and which were the unlucky days.

"To-day," he said, "will be lucky for any lad who assumes arms, because he will certainly gain such fame as no man of Ireland has ever gained before; but it will be unlucky for him, inasmuch as his life shall be short, and death shall come upon him while yet his years are few."

Cuchulain heard, and straightway put aside his play and made his way to where the King lay on his couch to rest.

"I have a boon to ask of thee, O King," he said; "let me, I pray you, take arms as a champion to-day."

"Who has told you to make this request?" asked the King.

And the boy replied, "It is Caffa, the magician."

Then the King, knowing the boy's strength and skill, granted his prayer, though he had not yet reached the age at which it was customary for the boys to take arms. He commanded that the seventeen sets of equipment that he kept always in readiness should be brought out, and Cuchulain tried them one after the

¹ Pronounced *Coo-hoolin*.

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other. Each broke in fragments under his strokes, and at last the King gave him his own spear and shield ; with these Cuchulain was content.

Just then Caffa came in to the King, and, seeing his pupil thus equipped, he asked, " What, are you taking arms already, little one ? "

" Why ! " cried the King, " did you not tell him yourself to come to me ? "

" I did not," replied Caffa.

Conor turned in anger to Cuchulain, but the boy cried out, " Forgive me, O King, I did not mean to deceive you. I heard Caffa telling his pupils that whoever assumed arms to-day should gain fame greater than that of any man who had ever lived in Ireland, with only this price to pay, that death should come to him while his years were but few. And so I made my prayer to you, O King."

" Great and famous indeed shall you be," said Caffa sadly, " but short will be your life."

" What care I for that ? " answered the boy ; " he who wins fame lives for ever, for his memory never dies."

After this Cuchulain began that wonderful career as a warrior which brought him the fame that had been promised him. To tell all the deeds that are recorded of him would fill many pages. He met grown men, the most famous of their time, in battle, and overcame them ; and he perfected himself in feats of arms in the school of the woman-warrior Scath, who dwelt in Shadow-land, whither he had journeyed alone over the Plain of Ill-luck, his guide a shining wheel, given him by a fairy youth.

While he was yet a youth he went a-wooing, and won for his wife Emer, the second daughter of Forgall the Wily, a great and powerful chieftain. She was very beautiful, with hair the colour of ruddy gold, bright eyes, and a skin that looked like rose-leaves ; she had a noble, fearless spirit, held her head proudly, and moved like a queen about her father's house. Forgall had sworn that this beautiful daughter of his should marry no one of lower rank than a king or a prince, and that to any other who dared to woo her a cruel death should quickly come. But Cuchulain cared nothing for these threats. He heard stories of



CUCHULAIN FOLLOWS THE SHINING WHEEL
Stephen Reid

Cuchulain

Emer, of her beauty and grace, and wisdom and courage, and at once he thought, "This is the only wife for me. She has the six gifts of womanhood which all true daughters of Erinn should possess : the gift of loveliness, the gift of song, the gift of sweet and pleasant speech, the gift of handiwork, the gift of wisdom, the gift of modesty. I will see her and talk with her, let her father do what he will."

So he ordered his chariot to be prepared and his two famous horses, the Grey of Macha and the Black Steed of the Glen, to be harnessed to it. Then he bade his charioteer, Laeg, to take the shortest road to the Garden of the Sun-god, Lugh, which was the home of Forgall the Wily. Swiftly the horses dashed along, and soon they reached the river Boyne and passed over it by the Ford of Washing of the Horses of the Gods ; and then they saw before them the fair flowering plains of Lugh and the fort where Forgall dwelt.

In the garden, under blossoming apple-trees, sat a group of comely maidens, busy with their needlework, and among them, guiding and directing the work, moved Emer. From afar Cuchulain knew by the noble poise of her head and the gracious ease of all her movements that this was the maiden whom he sought.

He alighted from his chariot and walked across the meadow, lovely with waving grass and golden buttercups, toward the garden gate, and, entering, he stood before Emer.

"God's blessing be on you and on your maidens," he said, and "May God make smooth the path before your feet," was the sweet-voiced reply. Then they talked together, and he told her who he was and why he had come ; and she in return told him of her father, of his cunning, and his strength, and the wonderful feats he had accomplished. She warned Cuchulain that there was much danger in his coming thither, for her father did not wish that any man should approach his daughter.

"He has given me as a bodyguard twenty men, and their captain is Con, my brother," she said ; "therefore I am well protected, and no man can come near me but Forgall knows of it. To-day he is gone from home on a warrior's expedition, and the twenty men have gone with him ; had he been here I trow he would have asked you your business ere this."

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"Why do you tell me these things?" asked Cuchulain. "Do you not know there is no man who can make me afraid?" This he said, not boasting, but telling that which was a simple and well-known fact; and he went on to tell Emer of some of the deeds he had done; how, when his spirit was roused by warfare, he could face forty men, and how great hosts fled at the sound of his name.

Then Emer told Cuchulain of her home and her father, and how she had been brought up and trained in all the graces and the knowledge which noble maidens must possess; and Cuchulain told her of King Conor and his Court, and of Scath the woman-warrior who trained youths of noble birth in all warlike arts in her dim country of Shadow-land. He talked in the ancient mystic language of the bards, and he was overjoyed when he found that Emer could understand and answer him. Never before, he said, had he found a woman who could do so. None of the maidens around could understand what they were saying, so they could speak as freely and securely as if they two were alone together; and when at length Cuchulain told Emer of his love, his passionate words came more readily from his lips in the tongue that the poets of his race had used than if he had spoken them in the ordinary language of every day.

"If you will not wed me," he finished, "never will I, Cuchulain, wed at all."

Then Emer answered: "He who would wed me must woo me with brave deeds, the deeds of warriors and of wise men, not only the feats of strength in which boys delight. At the end of a year come to me again, and if you have proved your manhood I will marry you, though danger and difficulty may lie in the way."

So Cuchulain went away, and for a year he strove to show himself worthy of the noble maiden to whom his troth was plighted. Such brave deeds he did that the whole country resounded with his fame, and the boy Cuchulain took a place, not only for strength and courage, but for wisdom also, and skill as a leader, among the great men of his race.

At the end of the year he sent a message to Emer, and she was ready to keep her promise. But Forgall guarded the fort well,



CUCHULAIN AND EMER
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CUCHULAIN PURSUES THE HOSTS OF MEAVE

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and would not let his daughter's wooer enter. Then Cuchulain came in his war chariot, with his band of brave followers, forced his way in, and carried off Emer. In the fight Forgall was killed and many of his men, so that the place which before was called the ' White Field ' was called the ' Turf of Blood ' from that day. Then Cuchulain and Emer went to their home.

Not long after came the great war against Meave, Queen of Connaught. Years before, when Cuchulain was only a tiny child, Fergus MacRoy, King of Ulster, had wished to marry a noble lady named Ness, who was a widow. Ness refused to be his wife unless he would promise to let her son Conor reign in his place for a year. For a long time Fergus refused, but because Ness would not give way and his desire to marry her grew ever stronger, at last he consented. Then the crafty Ness used all her arts to gain the favour of the people for her son, and by the end of the year she had so worked upon them that they held to Conor when he refused to give the crown back to Fergus, declaring that he would reign over Ulster for the rest of his life. In vain Fergus tried to take the kingdom from him, by argument first, and then by force. At last, filled with rage, the deposed King left Ulster and went to Meave, Queen of Connaught, beseeching her to come to his help.

Meave was very willing, for she hated the men of Ulster, and often there was strife between the two kingdoms. So she sent out her heralds and gathered her army together and made great preparations, and then she came with all her forces against King Conor. At this time Cuchulain was about seventeen years old, but he was so famed as a warrior that the men of Ulster looked on him as their champion against the foe. Stories of his marvellous prowess reached Queen Meave, and when, as was her custom, she asked the Druids and magicians what would be the outcome of the battle, all of them warned her against this wonderful boy, who, they said, could by his single hand bring an army to destruction. She asked Fergus about this Cuchulain, and Fergus, who had known and loved the lad all his life, told her such wonderful stories of the deeds he had done that Meave decided it would be better to withdraw her army for that time

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and wait until she could gather a larger force before she tried her strength against this formidable foe.

Two years later she came again. She had spent the time in sending her messengers throughout the land and forcing the chiefs, by threats or promises, to send men and stores of war for her army, and now she had a force so large that she thought she need fear no foe that could come against it.

The excuse she gave for her attack was a quarrel she had had with an Ulsterman, Daire of Cooley. Meave's husband, Ailill, possessed a wonderful white bull, called Finn-bennach, and she among all her cattle had none that could match it. This displeased her, and when word was brought to her that Daire of Cooley had a brown bull, which was equally wonderful, she determined to try and obtain it for her own. The herald who told her of the bull praised it in glowing words, "Brown he is and dark as night, terrific in strength and size. Upon his back at evening tide full fifty little boys can play their games. He moves about with fifty heifers at his side, and if his keepers trouble him he tramples them into the earth in his rage. Throughout the land his bellowings can be heard, and on his horns are gold and silver tips. Before the cows he marches as a king, with bull-like front, and with the resistless pace of a long billow rolling on the shore. Like to the fury of a dragon, or like a lion's fierceness is his rage. Only the Finn-bennach, the White Bull, is his mate and match, his pair in splendour and in pride."

It was small wonder that Meave should covet such an animal as this, and she sent messengers to Daire offering him a high price for his bull. But the messengers offended Daire, and he refused to have any dealings with them, bidding them tell Queen Meave to do as the men she had sent threatened she would do and come and take the bull; and this, Meave declared, was the reason she was coming with a great force into Ulster. She did not know, and Daire did not know, that the bulls were really the cattle of the gods, and had been sent on earth to bring strife and destruction among the people of Erin.

The men of Ulster prepared to meet the invader, but in the midst of their preparations a terrible misfortune came upon them.

Cuchulain

Long years ago Macha, the dread goddess of war, had visited their country to bring help to a noble warrior who was in distress. She came in the form of a mortal maid, only taller, stronger, and more beautiful than any mortal maid had ever been ; and the men of Ulster were jealous of her because she was swifter in running and more skilled in all the arts of war than they were. So they mocked her and ill-treated her, and in her wrath she laid a curse upon them. In the time of their greatest distress, when enemies were invading their borders and destruction threatened them, then, she said, she would send a sickness of mind and body on all the men of the land. They should lie at home, listless and helpless, and never strike a blow in defence of their country. The women and the children should not suffer ; only on the full-grown warriors should the plague fall.

She did not forget her word. Just when the army of Meave reached the borders of Ulster, and every man was needed if the country was to be saved, the sickness came. Not a hand was raised, not a man marched out to fight. Day after day the warriors lay in their halls, their eyes closed, their limbs helpless and inert, and the women in vain tried to rouse them. But on Cuchulain, since he was not fully grown, the curse did not come, and at the first word of the coming of the hosts of Meave he was on the borders to meet them.

Then began a long contest between that great army on the one side and Cuchulain on the other. There are many stories told of the deeds that he did and the ills that he suffered, but there is no space to tell them here. He wrought much ill to the men of Connaught, until at length Meave sent Fergus to him to make an agreement. Meave was to supply him with food and necessities, and each day a champion should be sent to meet him, so that he might fight the flower of Meave's army one by one. At the same time Fergus and Cuchulain agreed together that if they came face to face with one another in battle Cuchulain would flee ; but, in the final encounter which was to decide whether Ulster or Connaught should be victorious, Fergus would flee before Cuchulain, and in so doing draw the men of Connaught after him, so that Meave's host would be scattered.

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Day after day the chosen warriors came out, the bravest and strongest of the Connaught men, and one after another they fell before Cuchulain. Even Ferdia, who had been his comrade and fellow-pupil in the Shadow-land, and who was nearer to him in skill and strength than any other warrior of Ireland, he vanquished after a four-days' combat. But it was a stern fight, and it left Cuchulain sick and weary in his body and in his mind. He had come out against the hosts of Connaught at the beginning of the winter, and now it was early spring. Alone, save for Laeg, his charioteer, he had watched and fought through all those months. Little sleep had he had save a few hours at midday while Laeg kept guard. His body was wounded in many places and his strength had gone from him. He was sick at heart that he had killed his dear comrade Ferdia, and the thought of the woe which was coming on the country he loved while he lay helpless almost maddened him.

But in his extremity help came to him. Lugh, the god of the Long Arms, the god who from his childhood had loved and watched over him, appeared at his side, and with comforting words bade him sleep. "No harm shall come to Ulster while you sleep," he promised, "for I will watch and battle with the host."

So Cuchulain, with a great sigh of relief, lay down and slept. The long sleep brought him health and strength, and fairies came bearing herbs and balsams for his wounds, and immortal hands touched tenderly his torn and aching body, so that it grew whole and light.

The news of Cuchulain's wounds and suffering came to Sualtach his father, and the thought of his son's peril roused him from his sickness, and he tried to do what he could to help. He was not a great warrior, only an ordinary brave fighting man; he loved his son, but could not stand by his side as a champion. He thought to himself, "The lad sleeps, and that is well, but when he wakes the strife will begin again, and who can tell what will come of it? It is time that the men of Ulster roused themselves from the sickness and came to help him."

He mounted Cuchulain's horse and rode as fast as he could to Emain Macha. No watch was being kept, and no men were

Cuchulain

busy about the palace in the customary tasks. Only a few children played in the courtyard, and dogs came out to meet the stranger. Inside the women were going sadly about their household duties, stopping now and then to give a despairing shake to one of the men who lay full length on a bench or on the floor. But the men only lifted drowsy eyelids for a second's space, then sank again into heavy slumber.

But on a sudden came shouts and clear boyish laughter across the still air, and Sualtach turning, saw near by in a field the Boy-corps alert and active, diligently practising their games of skill, though their teachers had left them, and he blessed the brave lads who still, like Cuchulain, fought and strove though the men were idle.

Then Sualtach thrice gave a loud shout. "Your men are being slain," he cried, "your cattle driven away, your women fall as captives to the men of Erin. In wild Murthemne's plain Cuchulain all alone still held the foemen back, until the fight with Ferdia robbed him of his strength. Wounded in every joint Cuchulain lies, his gaping sores stuffed in with sops and bits of grass, his clothes held on with spikes of hazel-trees. Ulster, arise! Arise!"

Three times he shouted, yet no man roused, save that at the third time there were mutterings against the brawler who disturbed their peace. In fierce anger Sualtach turned, and jerked his bridle rein so that the horse stumbled. It threw him forward, so that his neck struck the sharp edge of his shield, which cut clean through it. The shield fell, its strap caught on the horse's feet, and the head fell into the shield. Then the horse turned, bearing the lifeless body and dragging the head on the shield. And all the time the head cried, "Your men are being slain, your cattle driven away, your women fall as captives to the men of Erin. In wild Murthemne's plain Cuchulain all alone still holds the foemen back. Ulster, arise! arise!"

"Too noisy is that head," muttered the King. "Put it upon the pillar that it may rest."

But even when a warrior had stirred himself and had put the head on a pillar it still kept up its cry, "Ulster, arise! arise!"

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Gradually the warriors were aroused. First one and then another stirred, and looked around and raised his head ; then they began to get up on their feet, pick up their disused weapons, and put themselves into their wonted fighting array. The sickness was passing from them, and memory was coming back.

Last of all the King stood up. In a flash everything was clear to him. He remembered the peril to his country, the need for an instant advance, and he shouted to his men, bidding them arm themselves in haste, to drive away the foe. "We will restore each captive woman to her child and home, every cow to her own meadow, and each stolen piece of ground to its own lord."

Then it was a wonder to see how bustle and clamour awoke in the hall that had been so silent. With a great shout the men set to work, and soon all were in battle array and ready to set forth. So eager were they that they would not wait until the troops could be brought in from the country round.

"Send out heralds," commanded the King, "and bid them march at once to join us. And send a herald to the Boy-corps to see how they have fared while we have slept."

In a few moments the herald came back, dismay upon his face. He could not find the lads of the Boy-corps, their playing-field was silent, and all their haunts deserted. Only one tiny boy he saw, sitting crying by himself.

"My comrades are all gone," said this boy; "they heard Sualtach say that Cuchulain fought alone and was in sore need of help, and they said that, since the warriors slept, the boys must go to his aid. They marched away, leaving me, because I am small and of little use yet in fighting," and he put his head in his hands and wept as if his heart were breaking.

The King's face was pale as the herald finished, and around him his chiefs stood silent with grief and horror. For not only the King, but all the most famous chiefs had sons in the Boy-corps, and they knew what its fate must be did it meet in battle the forces of Queen Meave. In trembling haste they mounted and set out, but well they knew it was too late, and their sons were lost.

Meanwhile Cuchulain had awakened from his three days' sleep

Cuchulain

and had found Lugh sitting by his side. The boy-champion felt healed and refreshed, but he was still too weak to stand upon his feet. He was eager to know what had happened while he slept, and Lugh assured him that the hosts of Meave had not moved a step forward. Then, very sadly, he told him of the fate of the Boy-corps.

"They came at night," said Lugh. "I did not know they were here. They marched in brave array right up to the tent of Queen Meave, and Follaman, who led them, demanded that the Queen's husband, Ailill, should meet him in single combat. But the cowardly men of Connaught drove them away with rough and jeering words, and the boys took their stand by the ford.

"'Here stand we firm till we have avenged Cuchulain,' they said. 'We stand for the honour of Ulster. Come out, you who will, and fight.'

"So brave they looked and so noble, a worthy enemy would have held them in honour and love. But Meave's army knew no pity, and this morning all that remained of those gallant lads was their fallen, mangled bodies strewn the banks by the ford. Yet not tamely did these boys die, for around them lay the bodies of many stout warriors whom they had slain. They were true sons of Ulster, Ulster's pride. Alas and alas!"

Cuchulain forgot his wounds and started up. No news could have been more grievous to him than this. The brave Boy-corps, his comrades whom he loved, all dead, and dead for his sake. He had not struck one blow to save them, but he would strike many to avenge them.

"Come," he cried to Lugh, "stay with me for this one night, and we two will go among the dastard men of Connaught and terribly avenge those brave, rash lads."

But Lugh shook his head. "Your strength is not yet returned," he said, "and as for me I must go back to Fairyland from whence I came. The fathers and brothers of these boys shall avenge them; and lo! see the banners of Ulster as her armies come marching over yonder hill."

Cuchulain turned. It was true. The Ulstermen at last were marching toward the foe. On they came, battalion after

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battalion, clan after clan; and still the long line stretched away and was lost in the distance.

All day they came on, until a mighty host was gathered; and Meave and Fergus watching from their camp knew that the day of Fate had come. The battle must be fought which would decide to whom the crown of Ulster should belong.

Cuchulain watched them from a mound to which he had bidden Laeg carry him. He saw his own corps marching up the hill, mighty men all of them, but going mournfully, without song or battle-cry, because their leader, Cuchulain, was not at their head. When he saw them he strove hard to rise and join them, but Laeg bound his limbs with strong cords, fearing lest in his eagerness he should forget the weakness of his body and throw his life away in a wild rush toward his comrades.

It was evening before all the army was assembled, and then they lit their watch-fires and gathered round them to eat the evening meal. Then the sentries saw, far away over the plain, beyond the great circles of light thrown by the blaze of the fires, the shadowy forms of cattle moving in the dimness, and by the size and majesty of their leader they knew it to be the Dun of Cooley. They saw a band of men rush out from Meave's army and try to drive the herd back to the camp; and the youth of Ulster too rushed forward battling with the enemy for the possession of the great Bull. But the Dun of Cooley broke easily from them all and set his terrible head towards Connaught, going forward with swift, resistless march, his herd following him. He sought the White-horned, and none could stay him.

Next day, as soon as the east grew red with the first rays of dawn, the men of Ulster went forth to battle. The hosts of Erin came out to meet them, and furiously the battle raged until the sun was high in the heavens. Yet neither side could drive back the other. Fergus at first remained in the camp, for he hated to fight against men of his own country and his old friends; but Queen Meave by her taunts drove him into the battle. Then he vowed he would find out King Conor, who alone of all Ulster's hosts was his enemy. With his famous Hard Sword in his hand he stood by the side of Queen Meave's chariot, where she sat in

Cuchulain

pride, her golden circlet on her head. Ailill was on the other side of the chariot, and these three dashed furiously into the battle, so that men gave way before them and the enemy's ranks were broken.

"Who are these who come from the camp of Erinn and scatter my men as the wind scatters dead leaves?" asked King Conor; and the warriors of his bodyguard answered:

"It is Fergus and Queen Meave who come indeed like a raging tempest across the plain."

"I will go down against them," said Conor, "and form once more the broken ranks of my men."

So, bearing his wondrous shield, the Ochain, he went, and his bodyguard with him, the bravest warriors in all the host. They locked their shields together and made a ring around him, for well they knew that if aught of ill happened to Conor all Ulster's army would flee and the battle be lost.

On came Fergus, mighty and terrible in his battle rage, and when he saw the ring of warriors with locked shields he knew that in their midst was Conor. With fierce strokes that no man could resist he made his way toward them and broke through their guard, scattering those proud champions as though they were but children playing at soldiers. With Hard Sword he struck three mighty blows on Conor's shield. The shield shrieked and roared as it did always when danger came near Conor, and the shrieks resounded through the field, so that all knew the peril of their King.

Far away Cuchulain lay weak and helpless, bound with strong cords that Laeg his charioteer had put upon him lest he should rise and rush into the battle. He heard the clash of shields and the battle-cries of those who fought, and he listened and longed to be with them. Then he heard a sound more dread than these, and he cried out in rage and grief, "I hear the shield of Conor crying out to tell of danger to the King. Loose now these bonds, O Laeg, that I may strike down the foe that threatens him."

Wonderfully his strength came back, and he burst the cords with which his arms were bound. Then Laeg, seeing that he could not be restrained, cut those that were left and brought to

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his master his weapons and his war chariot. He called to the Grey of Macha and the Black Steed of the Glen, and the two horses came, obedient to his voice. Then Cuchulain mounted his chariot and dashed over the plain toward the place where King Conor's shield still roared and screamed.

The men of Ulster saw him coming, glorious in his beauty and his strength, though he was worn and wasted and bore the marks of many wounds upon him ; and it seemed to them that a light streamed from him, making a radiant path across the field of battle. Loudly they shouted in welcome, and all their courage and hope came back to them, while Cuchulain, without pause and with not one glance to right or left, rode straight toward the King.

"Turn, Fergus," he cried, "turn and smite no more upon the shield of King Conor."

But Fergus for a moment did not recognize in the gaunt and war-worn man who challenged him thus the radiant youth Cuchulain.

"Who are you," he cried, "that speak such words to Fergus?"

"I am Cuchulain," was the answer ; "remember your promise."

Then Fergus looked up with a start into the thin and haggard face and knew it, changed though it was ; and a great sorrow came upon him, so that his battle wrath died away.

"I remember," he said, "and I will go, for you, Cuchulain, have not at this time the strength to stand up against me. I will make as if I fled before you, that the hearts of the men of Erin may weaken and dismay come upon them."

Then he turned, trailing Hard Sword behind him, and all Meave's great host believed him conquered. Fear came upon them, and they fled in a wild rout westward, rushing madly toward their homes. They dropped their shields and their weapons, and paid no heed to the voice of Meave, urging and entreating them to stand fast and bear themselves like men. Without pause or stay they pursued their headlong flight to the ford by which they had crossed the Shannon, longing only to be on the other side of the river.

Cuchulain

Cuchulain and his men followed close after them, killing many by the way. It was twilight when Cuchulain reached the ford and saw the disorderly and broken host which had once been Meave's great army struggling in haste and terror to reach the shelter of their own land. Then, because he hated to see brave men in so evil a case, and because he was weary after long hours of fighting and pursuit, he turned aside into a wood near by to



CUCHULAIN FINDS QUEEN MEAVE

wait until the hosts of Ulster should come up. And there in the dark wood he saw Queen Meave, alone and helpless.

"What do you here, Meave," he said, "while your men press wildly across the river with none to lead them? Why have you, their Queen, forsaken them?"

Then Meave, humbled to the dust, spoke sadly, "I am, indeed, a Queen, but I am a woman, and my strength fails me. You are my foe, but well I know you will not take revenge upon a fallen woman. Grant me, I pray you, a boon."

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"And what is the boon that Queen Meave would ask of her enemy?"

"That you will keep back your hosts while my men cross the ford and will let them pass to safety; that you will guard me until Fergus and Ailill come to take me to my home."

"'Tis much to ask," said Cuchulain, "yet shall it be done. None shall say that Cuchulain refused the prayer of a woman who was his enemy."

So Cuchulain stood up, and while the light faded and dark night came on he kept back the hosts of Ulster as they came on in hot haste, eager for pursuit; and for all their prayers and murmurings he would not let them stir beyond the boundary that he had set.

At last came Fergus, and there he saw Meave sitting in the dark wood, while Cuchulain stood near on guard. It seemed to him that this was the strangest end to a battle that he had ever seen, and he spoke scornfully, saying, "See what happens when a woman is set at the head of an army."

"Take her now," said Cuchulain. "I give her into your charge. One blow will I strike here for Ulster's honour to show that it was not through weakness or cowardice that I let the foe pass in safety."

He swung his sword aloft, and with one stroke cut off the top of a hillock near by. "Between Connaught and Ulster let that hill stand evermore, a witness to our strength and to our gentleness."

This was the end of strife between Ulster and Connaught. Queen Meave had learnt that her forces were no match for the land that had Cuchulain for its champion; and as for the Brown Bull, he could no longer be a cause of quarrelling, for he was dead. He had rushed with his heifers to the river Shannon, and the White-horned, hearing the bellowings of his foe, had left his pasture and come in haste to meet him. Then they fought with such fury that all the earth around them was red with blood. All night the noise of their furious bellowing kept the terrified people of the country awake, and when morning dawned the struggle was still going on. At last the Dun, gathering his

Cuchulain

strength, made one more tremendous onslaught on the White-horned, brought him to the ground, and fiercely gored him to death. Then the victor left the field of battle, and, torn and bleeding, turned toward his home, trampling down all who stood in his way. He rushed on until he reached his own pasture, and then, with one great roar that sounded like wild thunder among the hills, he fell down dead.

After the war was over many years went by in happiness and peace. Cuchulain lived in his beautiful home at Dun Dalgan with his wife Emer, and though he did not go out to battle he was not idle. Wherever there was wrong or oppression there Cuchulain was to be found as the champion of the weaker side, and when misfortune threatened the country men turned to him for help and counsel. So the years passed by, and his fame and honour increased. Meave, far away in Connaught, heard of the glory of Cuchulain, and hated him with an ever-growing hatred. She forgot how he had helped her and saved her army from destruction. She remembered only the months in which he had kept her whole force at bay, and how he had taken from her the victory she had looked for.

It was useless to think of invading the country again, and so she bent all her thoughts on the destruction of Cuchulain, and brooded over her plans day and night. She stirred up enemies against him wherever she could, trying to induce those whose friends had fallen before him in battle to annoy and harm him in every way they could devise. But little came of this, for none dared meet Cuchulain face to face, and Meave in desperation turned to more terrible helpers.

By evil spells she brought to her aid a company of hideous and wicked spirits, half goblin, half woman. Monstrous and misshapen they were, each having but one eye set in the middle of her forehead, and their right legs and left arms were lopped off to a stump. These goblins Meave sent throughout the world, bidding them visit distant and secret places and find out some means by which Cuchulain might be destroyed.

Away went the foul company, sending a poisonous wind before them and darkening the heavens as they passed. For five years

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they wandered, and reached at last the dark and fearful realm of Vulcan. Here they learned the secret they had come to seek, and when they had found out how to torture and destroy Cuchulain, his body and his spirit, they came back to Queen Meave.

"We went to the house of Vulcan," they said, chuckling in horrid glee, "and there we learned how every kind of woe and misery can be brought upon man. We learned the secrets of poisonous herbs and the use of charms that spoil men's lives and drive them to despair. We learned how to raise a magic stormy sea in which men may be drowned on dry land, and out of the forest twigs and leaves we learned how to form a host of fighting men, and to arm them with the spiked thorn of the thistle leaves or with the blackthorn barb. Then when we were coming away Vulcan gave us three spears called Wind, Good-luck, and Cast, and three swords, the Wounder, the Hacker, and the Hewer. 'By these three Spears or these three Swords the splendid Hound shall die,' he told us, and so we hurried back to tell you that your vengeance is sure."

Then Meave's eyes shone and her face flushed with triumph. She took the spears and swords one after another in her hands and waved them above her head.

"With these shall my hated enemy be brought low at last," she cried. "Go you straight and find him. Tempt him to come out from his home where Emer watches over him into the open plain. Give these spears and swords into the hands of men of my host who watch there for him day and night, and see that before three days have passed you bring to me the head of the Hound of Ulster."

Meantime in Dun Dalgan, by omens and signs that came to her, Emer had learnt that some terrible evil threatened her husband. So she persuaded him to leave his home and go with her and a band of trusted comrades to a beautiful secret glen which is called the Glen of the Deaf, because no sound of tumult or quarrel can reach it. Here day by day minstrels sang to him the songs he had always loved, and Emer planned all sorts of pleasant pastimes that she hoped would keep her husband occupied and happy.

But Cuchulain soon tired of this sheltered, idle existence, and

Cuchulain

longed for the active life he was wont to lead. Only by Emer's entreaties was he kept day after day in the beautiful palace which seemed to him a prison.

While he was there he was safe from his enemies. The horrible goblin women, search as they would, could not find him, until one of them rode on a strong wind up to the clouds of heaven and from there looked down over the earth. Her cruel eyes spied out the secret glen, and changing herself into a black raven, she swooped down and perched on the back of Cuchulain's chair.

Then the restless longing in the hero's mind grew stronger and stronger. He felt that he could not bear to remain another day in this lovely peaceful glen, far away from the warfare in which all his life had been spent. He thought he heard a voice telling him that Dun Dalgan was burnt, and that deadly foes were overrunning his country, bringing misery and ruin.

"Arise and help them, O Hound of Ulster," said the voice; and then he sprang up, heedless of all else, and tried to go. But he caught his foot in his mantle, so that he fell, and then his great brooch, which had fallen to the ground, pierced his foot, and this gave Emer time for entreaties and warnings.

"See," she said, "my beloved, how all the omens are against you. Wait but three days more, and the foul Children of the Blast who are planning your ruin will no longer have power over you. Wait, O Cuchulain, for my sake and for the sake of Ulster."

She wound her arms about him and looked up to him with pleading in her eyes. Cuchulain could not say her nay.

"I will wait," he said, "for our love's sake. But my soul is filled with shame, and my spirit is bowed within me because for the first time I have heard the call of battle and have lingered at my ease while others fight."

So that day he stayed, and the Children of the Blast, knowing that only two more days remained to them, worked with their horrid spells all through the night to draw him from his refuge. From the twigs and leaves they formed a great army which they placed round about the house where Cuchulain was, so that when

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morning dawned and he looked out it seemed to him that he was circled with a great host. They shouted and jeered and called him coward and many shameful names, so that he leapt up and would have rushed out upon them. But again Emer held him back.

" 'Tis but a phantom host, heed not their cries, for by their voices the dread enemy would lure you forth. Wait but one more day, and Conall Cernach, your comrade, will be back from travelling, and you and he together can face the mightiest host. Wait, O love of my heart."

Again Cuchulain was constrained by her entreaties, and gloomily he sat down, while his proud spirit chafed and fretted, and he thought scorn of himself for yielding, even to Emer. Not all the feasting and the songs, the dancing and the merry pastimes within his halls could win from him a smile. He sat among them all, silent and downcast, and when night came and he was left alone he took his spear and his shield and polished them lovingly, ready for the fight, and he sent to his charioteer, Laeg, to see that his two horses were ready at call.

Morning came, and the hateful goblin women, fearful now that they would fail, and filled with cruel spite, made their last effort. Round about the house they set a magic sea, whose waves seemed to come rolling in from an ocean far away, while the winds sighed and moaned above it. The sounds stirred in Cuchulain a great tumult. Madness came upon him, and he seized Emer in his arms and bade the others rush out and save themselves from the engulfing waves.

It was in vain that his wife and her maidens told him that there was no sea there, nothing but green and peaceful meadows, and that he saw what he did only through the enchantment that the goblin women had laid upon him.

" I see the horses of Manannan riding on the waves ; I hear Manannan's fairy harp sound gently o'er the billows ; Manannan's ancient face I see, beckoning me to him. Stay me no longer, my wife. The time is come, and I must go."

Then Emer knew that the end was near, for the seer had prophesied that when Cuchulain should see the horses of Manannan,

Cuchulain

the ancient Ocean-god, upon the waves, and hear his harps play, the hour of his death was coming, surely and swiftly.

So she called to Laeg to prepare his chariot, and she and her maidens armed him for battle ; and he sprang into his chariot full of joy and of ardour for the fight. But the two horses, for the first time since he had trained them to his will, reared, and refused to obey his hand.

“ Do not fail your master now in his great need,” entreated Laeg, gently trying to turn them in the way that Cuchulain wished them to go, and at last they allowed themselves to be persuaded ; but as they bore their master toward Murthemne’s plain, where Meave’s host was assembled, great tears dropped all the way from their sad and downcast eyes.

Then, while the Children of the Blast shrieked with delight, Cuchulain dashed onward. Before his eyes passed dreadful visions of burning homesteads and slaughtered women and children, and fair lands laid desolate. A great joy came upon him that at last he was free to save his land from those who would slay and ravage within her borders, and he met his enemies with proud, uplifted head and shining eyes, one man against a host.

All through that day the battle raged, and Cuchulain with his single arm made a great slaughter. At his first onset the foe scattered before him, and he mowed down men as reapers mow the corn. Then when they rallied and made a great charge against him he still stood firm, for he wore the magic armour that Scath of Shadow-land had given him, which no blows could pierce.

Twice he drove back the enemy with a terrible slaughter, and then the horrid goblin women swooped down upon the field with the three magic spears they had brought from the land of Vulcan. These they gave to three champions among Meave’s host, one to dark Curoi, Prince of Munster, one to Luga his son, and one to young Erc, King of Erin. Curoi first threw his weapon, which missed Cuchulain, but pierced the Grey of Macha.

At once Cuchulain sprang from his chariot to draw the spear from the side of his faithful steed, and as he bent over the Grey

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there came a second spear from Erc, which, touching Cuchulain's hip, flew past him and wounded Laeg, his charioteer.

"Alas!" cried Laeg, "now by this wound I die." But Cuchulain comforted him, bidding him seek shelter in the wood beyond, so that haply he might recover from his hurt and bear a last farewell from his master to Emer of the bright hair. For Cuchulain knew well that for him there could be no escape, and that the hour of his death was very near.

Then back into the fray he went, dealing right and left his deadly blows, like an avenging god, until he stood triumphant among the bodies of the foes he had slaughtered, while all the rest fled before him.

"Fling now the spear," called the Wild Women to Luga; "why do you wait?" And Luga, seeing the moment had come, took aim. Straight and true went the spear. It pierced Cuchulain's body, and the Hound of Ulster fell to the ground.

No shout of triumph rose from the ranks of the enemy. A silence deep and terrible fell on all that mighty host. Those who had fled returned, looking in awe and wonder on the dread Cuchulain, brought low at last. There he lay alone and dying, but even in death his mighty spirit did not fail. Slowly and painfully he dragged himself to his feet and tried to draw the spear from his body. But it broke away, tearing his flesh, so that the blood ran out and flowed in a slow stream along a furrow in the plain.

An otter crept out from the margin of a lake near by, and began stealthily to lap the blood as it flowed; and Cuchulain, angry to see the cowardly creature drink his blood while he was still alive, stooped painfully and picked up the shaft of his spear. He flung it at the beast, who slunk away. And then a raven came, drawing nearer and nearer, and swooped down to drink the crimson blood; but its claws slipped, and it was upset into the stream. At that Cuchulain laughed aloud—the last laugh, as he well knew, for his strength was going fast.

He closed his eyes, and the ring of his foes crept silently nearer, watching, as men might watch by a sick-bed, to see the great warrior die.

Cuchulain

"I thirst," said Cuchulain, "and would fain go to drink at yonder loch."

"Go then," they said, "and return again to us."

"If I come not," answered Cuchulain, "I bid you come and fetch me."

Slowly he dragged himself down to the water and drank, and washed his wounds, and turning went and stood beside a tall



HOW CUCHULAIN DIED

pillar of stone, an ancient landmark that stood up stark and grey by the lochside. He bound himself securely to the stone with his girdle, took his sword in his hand, and stood facing his enemies.

"I will not die lying down before the men of Erinn," he said; "I will die standing and facing them without fear."

So he stood, and the Grey of Macha, the cruel spear still in his wound, dragged himself to his master's side. (The Black Steed of the Glen had gone with Laeg.) It laid its faithful head on its

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master's breast, weeping great tears ; and then man and horse stood still while slowly the life went out of them.

"I will see if he is yet alive," thought Luga, and he drew cautiously near. As he stood by his side the great sword dropped from Cuchulain's grasp, and falling cut off Luga's hand. At that moment a sigh came from the hero, and with that sigh his spirit passed. So great a sigh it was that the stone to which he was bound split through all its length, and men call it the Pillar of the Hero's Dying Sigh to this day.

CHAPTER IV

FINN

ALTHOUGH the bardic romances which tell of Finn are among the dearest possessions of the people of Ireland, Finn is not a great national hero in the same sense as Cuchulain. A strong supernatural element is common to both sets of stories, but in the Ulster tales we never lose sight of the human element, the virtues or vices, the passions or duties of real men and women.

The world in which Finn lived was essentially unreal, and his adventures are pure romance undertaken as personal quests, like those of King Arthur's knights. The adversaries against which he strove were fairy beings, and he did not wage war against the material enemies of his country. Nevertheless he and his famous band, the Fianna, are creatures of flesh and blood, and the stories of their life together and of their relation to each other and to the King are deeply interesting.

The events are supposed to have taken place in the third century A.D., and we are transported into a very different atmosphere from that breathed by Cuchulain and his comrades. It is a later and more gentle age, when romance rather than tragedy and self-sacrifice inspires the minstrel's lay. The physical background is also very different. Cuchulain lived and fought among the bleak hills of Ulster. The scene of the Fianna stories is laid in the softer and more gracious south, a green and fertile country—fitting cradle of poetry and romance.

ABOUT two hundred years after the death of Cuchulain there lived in Ireland a great chieftain whose name was Cumhal. Of all the Irish chieftains he was the mightiest, for he was the head of the great company called the Fianna of Erin.

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All the Fianna were mighty warriors and hunters, and all of them were rich and noble. Yet though they owned splendid palaces, and great store of rich clothing and many treasures, they did not spend their time in idleness and feasting. They loved rather to make for themselves pleasant huts from the leafy branches of the great trees that grew in the wide forests, and to hunt the grey wolves and the antlered deer that roamed over the mountain slopes, or to catch the salmon and trout that were to be found in the streams. When the King of Ireland was at war, or when danger threatened him, they hastened to his side, for the Fianna were bound by an oath to serve the King faithfully, not sparing goods or life.

Cumhal was a brave and wise chieftain, and under his rule the Fianna increased in power and in glory. All through Ireland men spoke of Cumhal with pride, and feared him only less than they feared the King. But some of the proud nobles of the Fianna were jealous of him, and were angry to think that they must submit to one whom they held to be no better than themselves. More especially the Clan Morna, a greedy and disloyal tribe, hated Cumhal and longed to bring about his destruction, and at length they rose in rebellion against him. A great battle was fought near the City of the Hurdle Ford, which is the name that Dublin still bears in the Irish tongue. In this battle Lia, the chief of Luachar in Connacht, who had been Cumhal's treasurer and had charge of the Treasure Bag of the Fianna, wounded the chief who had always shown him much loving kindness; then Goll, son of Morna, smote him and he died.

Goll and Lia hastened to carry off the Treasure Bag, that it might not fall into the hands of any of the dead chief's friends. This bag was made of a crane's skin, and held many precious things—rare jewels, and richly ornamented weapons that were possessed of magic powers, and other treasures, strange and wonderful, that had been taken from the Fairy Folk in the days when they strove with men for the kingdom of Ireland. Lia took it away with him to his *dun*, or castle, and hid it in a great chest made of yew wood, and Goll became the chieftain of the Fianna.

Finn

Cumhal left two sons, Tulcha who was old enough to bear arms, and Demna who was a tiny baby. Tulcha fled from the country and took service with the King of Scotland. Murna, the wife of Cumhal, feared to keep the baby Demna with her lest Goll should find him out; so she gave him in charge of two wise women, one of them a Druidess, who had been of Cumhal's household.

"Take him to some distant and solitary place," she said, "and rear him as best you can, remembering that he is the son of a great chief."

The two wise women fled hastily to the lovely Slieve Bloom Mountains, and there the baby grew up to be a strong and beautiful boy. Though he had only women for his teachers, he learnt to hunt and fish and throw the spear, and to kill a wild bird, while it was flying, with a stone from his sling. He could run down and kill a stag without a dog to help him, and if he were in the same field with a hare he could run so that the hare could never leave the field, for Demna was always before it.

In the winter evenings the Druidess taught him to read from the books of the wise men of Ireland, and she told him of his father Cumhal, chief of the Fianna, and how he had been foully slain.

"You, Demna," she said, "when the day of destiny shall come, will surely take his place and be one of the greatest chieftains in Ireland. See that you are fit and ready."

So Demna practised himself in all the arts that warriors and hunters need, though he had little chance to test his strength and skill against others. But one day, as he wandered through the woodland, he came to the house of a great noble where a band of boys, sons of the chief men of Ireland, were being trained in manly exercises. They were playing at hurley, and when they saw Demna watching they asked him to join them, and he did so gladly. The side he was on won so easily, that they sent some of those who were with him to the opposite side, and this they did again and again, until he was left alone to play against all the others. Even then he drove his ball straight through the goal, so that his companions grew angry, and fell upon him in a body.

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Demna, not a whit afraid, struck out at them sturdily, until seven were on the ground and the rest in flight before this wonderful stranger. Then Demna quietly took his way home.

"Who was it from whom your whole band cowardly fled?" asked the lord of the house, when the tale was told; and the boys replied shamefacedly, "It was a tall shapely lad, and very fair." The word for 'fair' is, in the Irish tongue, *finn*, and from that Demna came to be called 'Finn,' or, 'the Fair One,' until his former name was almost forgotten.

Soon all the youths in the country had heard of Finn and his wondrous strength and skill. There were many of nobler nature than those with whom he had first played, and these gathered round him and became his loyal and loving followers. Together they played and hunted and practised with their weapons, until tales of their exploits came to the ears of Goll.

"This fair-haired youth must be the son of Cumhal," he thought, and he sent out spies to bring him back certain news. But before the spies reached the Slieve Bloom Mountains Finn's foster-mother had heard that they were coming.

"You must leave this place," she said to Finn, "or Goll will find you and slay you. Go, and may blessing and victory go with you."

Finn was very sad at leaving the kind old woman, but he rejoiced to think that the life of adventure he had longed for was now to begin. Many of the youths of his company, when they heard that he was setting out on a free, wandering life, resolved to come with him, and they started out gaily, a blithe, high-hearted band.

Now, not all the warriors of the Fianna had owned Goll as their chief. Some of the older men, among them Cumhal's brother, had made their way to one of the largest and wildest forests of Connaught, and there they had lived hardily and painfully, yet willing to suffer anything so that they might be free. They lived in a hut they had made for themselves from branches of trees plastered over with mud and roofed with reeds from the lake. For food, they had only the flesh of the animals they could kill in the forest.

But the years that had changed Finn from a babe to a tall

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youth had brought these noble warriors to extreme old age, and now it was only with painful labour that they could manage to get enough food to keep life in them, and to hew wood for the fire which gave the heat their feeble bodies needed. Still they kept brave hearts, and feared nothing except that Goll might find out their hiding-place and force them to submit to his rule.

One day they were startled by the sound of voices near their hut, and they looked at one another fearfully, thinking that the day they had so long dreaded had come. Proud and unflinching they sat, awaiting their doom, warriors to the last.

The sounds drew nearer, and a company of youths, tall and of noble bearing, came lightly toward them. The foremost was taller than the rest, and broader-shouldered, and his bright head, shining against the forest leaves, made the old men think of a saying they had heard in their youth concerning a certain chieftain, that when he came out to battle men thought they looked upon the rising of the sun.

The lads came nearer and looked upon the old men, sitting so brave and stedfast, and they knew them for noble warriors, though their clothes were in rags and their feeble hands could scarcely hold the rusty weapons upon which they rested. Then the leader of the band cried out :

“ Which of you is Crimmal, son of Tremnor ? ”

“ I am Crimmal,” said one of the old men, and the youth knelt down and took the aged warrior’s shaking hand in his.

“ My lord and chief,” he said, “ I am Finn, son of Cumhal, and the day of deliverance is come.”

That was a day of joy to the lonely, weary old warriors. It seemed to them as if they had found gallant sons who would reverence and tend them, and free old age from all its bitterness. That night they feasted together, and Crimmal recalled a seer’s words that one day Cumhal should be avenged and his race again rule over the Fianna. “ It was said,” Crimmal told them, “ that he who should rule would be known by this sign, that he carried the Treasure Bag of Cumhal.”

Then Finn rose, and placed upon Crimmal’s knee a skin bag stained in patterns of red and blue.

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"Tell me if this is the Treasure Bag," he said.

Eagerly Crimmal opened it and spread out its treasures. There were the shining jewels and the magic weapons.

"These be Cumhal's treasures," said Crimmal; "the time is come."

"This bag we took yesterday from the house of the Lord of Luachar," said Finn, "and it fell out in this way. We saw by the wayside a woman, noble and stately, weeping over the body of a slain youth, and she cried out to us to avenge the death of her only son, who had been slain wantonly that day by the Lord of Luachar. Then I and my company went to the dun of that lord, and we stood outside the earthen rampart, and called to the Lord of Luachar, and bade him pay the blood-money for the youth he had slain. But he laughed scornfully, and told us to be gone. Then we went into the forest and gathered great bundles of brushwood which we piled against the oaken fence that was set on top of the rampart, and to these we put fire. The Immortal Ones caused a fierce wind to blow, and quickly the fence was in a blaze, and as soon as a gap was made in it we charged in. Half of the men of the castle we killed, the rest escaped, and the Lord of Luachar I myself slew in the doorway. Then we went through the palace and took much spoil, and this bag we found in a chest of yew wood."

The old men rejoiced to hear that the traitorous Lord of Luachar was dead, and they praised Finn, and lamented that neither his father nor his mother could see him and rejoice in his brave deeds.

For some time the young men stayed with the old warriors, helping them and caring for them, and then Finn set out to seek Finegas, a wise man and a poet, who dwelt by the river Boyne. For Finn knew that he had much to learn before he would be fit to take his father's place as the head of the Fianna, and he knew that Finegas could teach him some of the things that he must know.

Now in the river Boyne lived the Salmon of Knowledge, and there was an old prophecy that he who should eat this salmon would become the wisest of men. It was in the hope that he

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might catch this wonderful fish that Finegas had for seven years made his dwelling-place by the river Boyne. The salmon lived where the fair river broadens out into a great, still pool, with green banks sloping upward from the clear, brown water, and often Finegas had tried to catch it, but always in vain.

Soon after Finn came to live with him he, to his great joy, caught the salmon, and he bade Finn cook it, charging him strictly not to eat a morsel. But as Finn turned the fish upon the spit he burnt his finger, and quickly he put it in his mouth to ease the smart. When the fish was cooked he took it to his master. Finegas looked at him and saw at once that a great change had come over him; his eyes, instead of being the eyes of a young man, were the eyes of a sage.

"Have you eaten of this salmon?" he asked.

"I burnt my finger as I turned it," the lad replied, "and I put my finger into my mouth."

"My years of watching and waiting have been of no avail," thought Finegas bitterly; "it is this boy who is destined to become the wisest of mankind. Take the dish away," he said to Finn, "eat it, and go back to your home, for I can teach you no more."

So Finn went, having learnt from Finegas the three things that make a poet, which are, Fire of Song, Light of Knowledge, and the Art of Extempore Recitation. He felt now that the time had come for him to take the place that had been his father's, and the next time that Conn, the King of Ireland, called 'Conn of the Hundred Battles,' held his yearly assembly of the lords and princes of the kingdom, Finn set out quite alone for the royal palace.

Goll was at the assembly, and he and the other sons of Morna took the places of honour at the banquet, and below them sat the other members of the Fianna. Finn came in quietly and took his place among these. He knew that even if he was recognized as the son of Cumhal he would not be attacked, for it was the law, which none dare break, that no guest of the King should quarrel with another, and no weapon should be drawn during the assembly.

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Conn, at the head of the table, looked with pride upon his assembled chiefs, and he marked at once the unknown youth whose bright head and broad shoulders rose above those of the others who sat at meat with him. He bade his cupbearer take a horn of wine to the stranger.

"Drink now a cup of wine with me," cried Conn, "and declare to us who you are and what is your lineage."

"I am Finn, the son of Cumhal," the youth replied, standing up and looking toward the King.

Every head was raised with a start, and men whispered to each other, "It is Cumhal returned from the dead," so like was the tall, noble youth to his gallant father.

"What seek you here?" asked Conn.

"To be your man, O King, and to do you service as my father did," replied Finn.

"It is well," said the King. "Your father was my friend, and served me faithfully."

Then Finn put his hand in the King's, and swore to be loyal and true, and Conn gave him a seat next to his own son, Art, and the feasting went on merrily.

It happened that at this time the people of the royal burg of Tara were afflicted by a goblin who came every day at dusk and worked much harm to all the inhabitants he met with. This goblin bore a harp, and the music he played was sweet beyond any that mortal man had heard, so that those who listened stood still, and could not move until the music had ceased. King Conn offered a great reward to any who would rid the town of this goblin, and when Finn came to him and said, "Will you put me in my father's place as chief of the Fianna if I destroy this spirit of evil?" he bound himself by a solemn oath that he would do so.

So Finn went forth to the adventure, and on the way there came to him a man named Fiacha, who had been one of Cumhal's most trusty followers. He put into Finn's hands a leathern casket, inside which was a spear with a head of bronze ornamented with gold. "Take this," said Fiacha; "it is an enchanted spear, and with it you will be able to overcome the goblin and his wiles."

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Then he told Finn what he must do, and the youth took the spear and went forth gladly and hopefully.

That evening as dusk was coming on he took his place on the hill outside the city of Tara and began slowly to pace round its walls. He listened intently for the sound that would tell him the evil thing was approaching, and soon he heard a faint sweet note come drifting across the misty plains that lay beneath him. Very low it was, and yet the music stirred Finn's heart so that he almost forgot his quest in his longing to hear more.

Nearer and nearer it came, and the sounds formed themselves into a melody so poignant and full and sweet that Finn stood still enchanted, his limbs relaxed and all his strength gone from him. At length he saw a shadow shape holding a shadow harp coming swiftly toward him, and then suddenly he remembered why he was there.

With a terrible effort he forced his nerveless hand to draw the spearhead from its case, and he laid it against his forehead as Fiacha had bidden him do. At once new strength rushed into him; a fury came upon him, and shouting the battle-cry of Cumhal he dashed forward.

The music ceased with one long, wailing sound, the awful shape turned and fled, Finn following. Northward it went till it came to the Fairy Mount of Slieve Tuad, and there Finn overtook it and drove his spear through its back. All night he spent on the mountain, and what he saw there he never told to mortal man; but next day he brought to King Conn, on the point of his spear, something that looked like the shadow of a head, so wan and pale it was, so dim the light of its sad eyes.

Then Conn of the Hundred Battles called the Fianna together, and said :

"Here is Finn, your captain by birthright and swordright. See that you obey him, and he that will not, let him depart from my kingdom and serve another king."

Then all men looked at Goll, but he came forward and said, "For my part, I will be Finn's man under thee, O King."

Now where Goll led it was not hard for the others to follow, and all took the oath peaceably; so that Finn became the head

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of the Fianna and ruled over them until the day of his death. Strongly and wisely he ruled them, yet without harshness, so that they won great glory and their fame spread through all the land. Many of those he conquered were so won by his fair and merciful treatment that they became his followers, and among these was Conan, son of the Lord of Luachar. For seven years he was an outlaw, and did much damage to the



FINN SLAYS THE GOBLIN

Fians, burning their dwellings and harrying their cattle, but at last he submitted to Finn, and served him loyally for thirty years.

Another of Finn's chief men was Dermot of the Love Spot. He was so fair and noble to look on that all who saw him loved him. Then there was Keelta MacRonan, skilled in poetry and the art of reciting; and Geena, who was at first slothful and selfish, but whom Finn cured of his faults by good counsel; and many more.

From all the country round about came the young men,

Finn

sons of mighty chiefs, praying that they might be admitted into the company of the Fianna. These were the tests that Finn gave them. First, he who wished to enter the band must know the Twelve Books of Poetry of the Irish race and be able to make verse himself after the Irish fashion. Next, he was taken and buried up to his middle, a shield and a hazel stick were given him, and with these he must defend himself against nine warriors who cast their spears at him, and must show no wound. Then his hair was woven in braids and he was chased through the forest by the Fians; no braid of his hair must be disturbed nor twig crack under his foot, nor must he be overtaken. He must be able to leap over a lath level with his brow, to run at full speed under one level with his knee, and to draw a thorn out of his foot without slackening speed. He must take no dowry with a wife.

The years passed, and Conn of the Hundred Battles died, and Cormac MacArt, his grandson, reigned in his stead. Cormac held Finn in high honour, as Conn had done, and in all assemblies he was given the highest place after King Cormac himself and the kings of the five provinces of Ireland—Ulster, Munster, Connaught, Leinster, and Mid-Erinn.

It was the custom that toward the end of the summer a great feast should be made by Finn at Dun Allen, and afterward a great hunt be held in one of the forests. This year the hunt was to be in the territory of Thomond and Desmond, in Munster, so after the feast Finn with his party set out and came to the hill of Knockany that overlooked the great forest. Beaters were sent out, and they went across plains and through ravines, and over the green swelling hills of that fair country; and as they went pleasant sounds arose on the chill autumn air. There was the baying of the dogs, the full-throated cries of the hunters, and, above all, the clear note of the Fian hunting-horn.

Finn heard the clamour as he sat with his chiefs—Goll, and Art MacMorna, and Liagan the Swift-runner, Dermot of the Love Spot, Keelta, son of Ronan, and Conan the Bald, the man of the scurrilous tongue—on the hill of Knockany. It sounded

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sweet to him, for he loved the chase, and most of all he loved this yearly hunt which brought his band together in goodwill and fellowship.

After a time one of Finn's runners came to him and said, "A stranger is approaching from the westward, O Finn, and I like not his appearance."

There labouring up the hillside came a huge, ungainly man, dark-faced and ugly. His clothes were so ragged and dirty one might have thought they had been picked up from a rubbish heap; his shield and his arms were rusty and broken. He was dragging at a rope which was fastened round the neck of a mare, who was uglier and in even worse case than her master. All her bones showed plainly through her skin, and as her master gave vicious pulls on the rope to hasten her dragging, unwilling footsteps, all her bones seemed to rattle. At every few yards she planted her clumsy forefeet firmly on the ground and refused to go farther, and then the man beat upon her bony sides with an iron-bound cudgel.

Long it took this strange pair to reach the top of the hill, but at last they came to where Finn and his chiefs were sitting. The man louted in clownish fashion, and Finn said :

"Who are you, and what is your business in the midst of the Hunt of the Fianna ? "

"I know not," said the fellow, "of what blood I am, gentle or simple, but I have come over the sea to find service with some great lord, and I have heard that Finn is just, and ready to take any who will work."

"And what is your name ? " asked Finn.

"I am called 'Gilla Darca' (the Hard Gillie)," replied the man.

"And why was that name given you ? " asked Finn again.

"Because," said the gillie, "there is no man from whom a lord finds it harder to get service and obedience than from me."

Then he turned to Conan the Bald, and asked him, "Which has the higher pay among the Fianna, a horseman or a footman ? "

"A horseman has twice as much as a footman," replied Conan

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"Then I will be a horseman," said the fellow. "See, here is my horse. Have I your permission," he said to Finn, "to turn her out with the rest?"

"Do so," said Finn.

Then the fellow threw the rope over the mare's neck, and she galloped away to where the other horses were quietly feeding. Soon there arose a great noise and disturbance, for the vicious creature began to bite and kick. She knocked the eye out of one horse, bit off the ear of another, and broke the leg of a third.

Up started Conan the Bald in great anger.

"Take her away!" he cried. "Were it not that Finn bade you loose her, I would dash out her brains. Many a bad bargain has Finn made, but never one as bad as this."

"I will not take her away," said the man surlily; "it is the work of a horseboy, and I am no horseboy."

Then Conan in wrath laid the halter on the beast's neck and dragged her back before Finn, and Finn said:

"'Twas well done, Conan. Leap now on the brute's back and gallop her over hill and dale till her strength is gone, to punish her for what she has done among the other horses."

So Conan, scrambling and tugging, managed to mount the creature, and then he dug his heels into her sides and struck at her, but nothing he could do would make her move.

"You are too light a weight, Conan," said Finn, "since she is used to carry the huge fellow yonder. Mount now, more of you, and see what she will do."

Then, thinking it fine sport, thirteen men of the Fianna mounted behind Conan. Down went the mare flat on the ground, but could not shake them off; then clumsily she rose up again, but still they clung on.

"This is a fine thing," said the gillie angrily, "you make a sport of my horse and of me the first day I enter your service. I will have no more of it, so now I wish you good-bye. False was the praise I heard of you, O Finn."

With surly looks and downbent head he shuffled away, going slowly round the side of the hill. But when he was out of sight

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he girt up his coat and ran fast, like a swallow or a deer, or a March wind rushing over a mountain.

No sooner did the mare see her master go round the hill, than, with Conan and the other thirteen on her back, she dashed off after him. The rest of the Fianna shouted with laughter at the strange sight, and ran after the mare, calling out mocking words, to which Conan replied angrily, telling them, if they were not cowards, to come to the rescue.

Then Finn joined in the chase, and away they all went over hills and through valleys till they came to the seashore. Into the water dashed the gillie, and after him went the mare; but just at the brink Liagan the Swift caught her by the tail. He could not stop her, and he too was dragged into the water, and away they all went, the mare and her fourteen riders and Liagan hanging on to her tail, swiftly on over the water until they were out of sight.

Those who were left on the shore looked at each other in dismay.

"Our comrades must be rescued," said Finn, "else shall we be for ever dishonoured. Let us now find a galley in which we can sail after them."

So they found a galley, and Finn with fourteen picked men of the Fianna embarked in it. Sturdily the men bent to their oars, and the ship went swiftly over the waves. Day after day they went, seeing nothing but the sky above them and the sea beneath, and hearing nothing but the lapping of the cool water against their boat. At length, after many days, they drew near to a high, grey cliff.

"You, Dermot, are the best climber among us," said Finn; "go now and find a way, and when you are at the top procure ropes to draw us after you."

Then Dermot of the Love Spot went up the face of that terrible cliff; when he reached the top his strength was almost gone. He looked round and saw a stretch of barren country, with no house or sign of a human being. "There are no ropes to be had here," said Dermot to himself, "I must go on farther."



THE CHASE OF THE MARE
Stephen Reid



DERMOT TAKES UP THE HORN
Stephen Reid

Finn

He went on and soon came to a wild wood, thick and tangled, and full of the noise of streams, the sighing of winds, the twittering of birds, and the hum of bees. Through it he made his way, and soon came to a great tree which spread out its branches over a pile of rocks.

On top of the rocks was a richly ornamented drinking-horn, and at its foot a well of clear water. Dermot was hot and thirsty after his hard climb, and he eagerly took up the horn and stooped to fill it with water from the well. A loud harsh murmur arose from the water.

"Ho, ho!" said Dermot, "this is forbidden water, I see"; but nevertheless he filled the horn and drank.

In a few minutes he saw coming toward him through the wood a warrior fully armed. As he came up he shouted furiously to Dermot, "Who are you that come wandering through my wood and drinking the water from my well?" With threats and curses he fell upon Dermot, and the two strove fiercely together. They fought all through the afternoon, without either gaining any advantage, and when darkness began to fall the strange warrior dived into the well and disappeared.

Dermot felt very disappointed that the fight had been thus broken off, but, seeing his foe had vanished, he set about making himself as comfortable as possible for the night. He killed a deer, made a fire and roasted its flesh, then supped heartily, drinking many draughts of the delicious spring water, and laid down to sleep.

He woke early next morning, and saw the warrior standing by the well looking as angry as before.

"It is not enough, Dermot," he cried, "that you walk in my woods and drink my water, but you must slay my deer also."

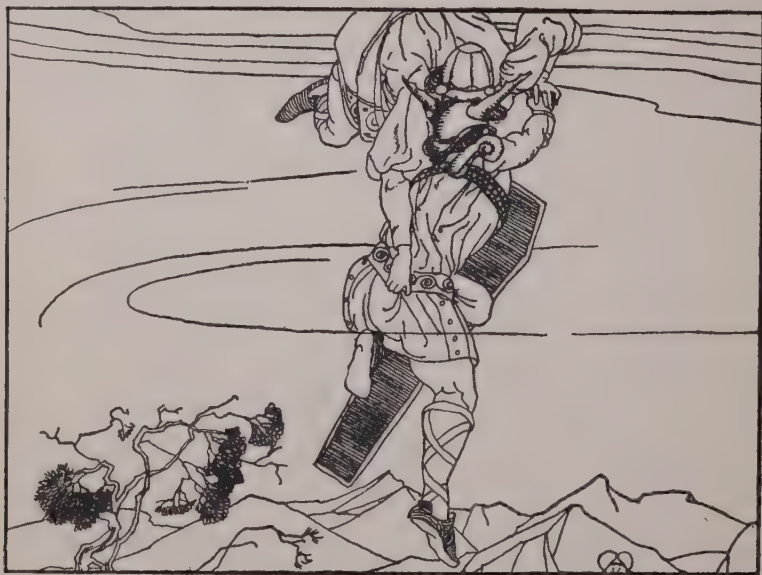
So they fell to blows again, and all through the day they fought, and yet neither gained a victory over the other, and as evening came on the Champion of the Well once more dived into the water and disappeared.

Next morning the fight began again, and again it lasted all day. But now Dermot had learnt to be wary; he watched his opponent closely, and just as the Champion was about to dive

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as before, he gripped him about his body with a grasp he could not shake off, and when he dived he carried Dermot with him.

Then a faintness came over Dermot so that he knew nothing until he found himself and his companion lying on a wide plain, before the walls of a great city. Men came out of the city and bore off the Champion, but they beat Dermot savagely and left him, believing him to be dead.



DERMOT DESCENDS WITH THE WARRIOR INTO THE WELL

He lay quite still and helpless until he felt the touch of a foot stirring his bruised and aching body. He opened his eyes and saw an armed man standing by him, and at once his hand went to his sword.

"Stay, my son," said the stranger, "I come to do you good, not harm. I will take you out of reach of your enemies, to a place where you may rest in safety."

Then, though he was weak and sore wounded, Dermot rose, and his strength came back to him. He followed the warrior for many miles, until at length they came to a strong fortress. They

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entered, and were greeted by crowds of men-at-arms and fair maidens, who spoke kindly to Dermot, bidding him welcome. The most beautiful maiden of them all, daughter of the warrior who had brought Dermot to the fortress and who was the King of the country, dressed the stranger's wounds with healing herbs, so that soon he was quite recovered. All this, the King told Dermot, was done for the sake of Finn.

"I myself was in the service of Finn once," he said, "and a better master man never had."

In this land, which was called the land of Sorca, Dermot stayed for many days, until one morning a small band of men was seen approaching the castle. As the men drew nearer Dermot to his great joy recognized them as Finn and the thirteen of the Fianna who had come with him over the sea. He hastened to them and brought them to the King, and there was great rejoicing. When they had feasted and were refreshed, Finn told the story of how they had come to the land of Sorca.

"When we found that Dermot did not return, we feared that some mischance had befallen him, and we determined to make our way over the cliff to seek for him. This we did with much labour and difficulty, and following his track we came to a well in a wood, and saw by the ashes of a fire and fragments of deer's flesh that here he had eaten and rested. But beyond this we could find no sign of the way he had taken, and as we were searching in much perplexity there came riding up a tall warrior on a dark grey horse, who greeted us courteously. We asked him if he could tell us aught of our lost comrade, and he replied that if we would follow him we should soon learn what we desired to know.

"So we followed him, and he led us by dark and winding ways through the forest until we came to a great cavern in the hill side. Into this we entered, going down and ever down in darkness and silence until it seemed that we must be many miles below the surface of the earth. At last we saw a ray of light in front of us, and soon we came out into a bright and lovely place where the sun shone and birds sang and streams murmured gently. Before us we saw a great dun, and going toward it we saw him whom we had come to seek."

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Then said the King of Sorca to Finn: "It is by my will that you have been brought here, and the reason for my bringing you is this. The Champion of the Well with whom Dermot fought is King of the country that borders upon mine, and he wishes to take my land too that he may be King of all the Underworld. With your help I can conquer him, but if you do not wish to fight for me I will not constrain you, but will send you back safely to your own land."

"Willingly would I fight for you," said Finn, "but first I must find and rescue fifteen of my men whom we came hither to seek."

"They are safe," replied the King of Sorca, "and are guarding the borders of my kingdom."

"Then," said Finn, "we will go with you against this insolent Champion of the Well."

The army was arrayed, and next day they marched against the enemy. The King of the Greeks with a band of fierce mercenaries had come to the help of the Champion of the Well, and the Greek King had brought with him his daughter, whose name was Tasha. She was said to be the most beautiful maiden in all the world, and she rejoiced in her heart that Finn had come against her father, for she had heard many tales of his generosity and his great deeds, and, though she had never seen him, she had for a long time loved him dearly.

When the armies were face to face the King of the Greeks cried, "Which of my men will challenge the best of these men of Erinn to single combat?"

His son sprang forward, crying, "That will I!"

So a champion whose name was Oscar was chosen from among Finn's men, and the armies on either side sat down to watch the combat. The fight was stern and long, but at last Oscar brought the Greek Prince to the earth and cut off his head.

Then the Fianna with the host of the King of Sorca went back rejoicing to their camp, and there they found Conan the Bald and the fourteen men who had gone with him on the mare's back.

But Tasha, the Greek King's daughter, could not sleep that

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night for thinking of Finn, for now she had seen him she loved him even more fervently than she had done before. At length she rose, and going softly, she took from the wizard of the Greek King his branch of silver bells which, when shaken, would cause a whole host of men to fall asleep. By its help she passed safely out of the Greek lines, and through the lines of the King of Sorca, and came to the tent of Finn.



FINN AND THE PRINCESS OF GREECE

When Finn saw her he was glad, for at the first sight of her marvellous beauty he had lost his heart, and had been as sleepless that night as she had been. So they talked together, and she promised to be his wife and go with him back to his own country of Erinn.

When the King of the Greeks found that his daughter was gone he was very angry, and he offered a great reward to whoever would bring her back and slay Finn. But Finn and the King of Sorca came out against their enemies once more, and drove them away as the wind drives dead leaves, so that the

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Champion of the Well was utterly defeated and the King of the Greeks fled back to his own country.

After the battle the King called Finn to him.

"What shall I give you," he said, "for your valiant help against my enemies?"

"When you were in my service," said Finn, "I do not remember making you any payment. Let that service go against this, and so we are quits."

But Conan the Bald, who was near by, cried out, "Nay, then, but what shall I have for my ride on the mare of the Gilla Darca?"

"What would you have?" asked the King.

"I do not ask for gold or silver," replied Conan, "but I claim that amends be made for the indignity that has been put upon me. Let fourteen of the fairest women of Sorca be put upon the mare, with your wife, O King, clinging to the tail, and let them be borne across the sea even as we were."

The King of Sorca smiled and turned to Finn.

"Behold your men," he said.

Then Finn looked round, and behold the army and the plain had vanished, and he stood on the shingly beach of that same little bay whence Gilla Darca and his mare had started on their wild journey across the sea. He rubbed his eyes and looked round to see if he could find out by what means he had been brought back, and his men, who stood by him, rubbed their eyes too. But they could see no sign of a ship on all the blue, sunlit waters, and they could hear nothing but its pleasant ripple, which sounded to them like low laughter.

Finn might have been inclined to believe that the whole adventure had been but a dream had it not been that a little way from him stood the Princess Thasa holding out her white hands. Finn strode to her and took them in his own.

"Come then," he said, "shoulder your spears, my comrades, and away with me to the Hill of Allen, where shall be held the wedding feast of Tasha and Finn MacCumhal."

So Finn and Tasha were married, and lived happily together in the land of Erinn, and during Finn's lifetime the Fianna

Finn

kept its high place and were famed throughout Ireland and all the countries round about. But after Finn was killed at the battle of Brea the band grew weak and was broken up. So that in the days when the good St Patrick came to Ireland their deeds were almost forgotten, and where the great Dun of Allen had once stood was nothing but weeds and whin bushes.

CHAPTER V

BEOWULF

THE story of Beowulf was brought to England from the North by some of the tribes who settled in the country during the Saxon invasion which began in the fifth century. In their own land it had probably been known long before that time. It was not written down, but stored in the memories of the scop, or bard, who sang it at the feasts given by the lords of the Saxons to their warriors in the mead hall. In this way it was handed on and became well known among the people, until at length, probably in the tenth century, it was written down.

The story is of the greatest interest to all English people, for we learn from it, more than from any other source, of the life led by our ancestors in those far-off days. It is a stern, even a sombre tale of strenuous adventure, not against human foes, but against monsters who are more terrifying than any mortal enemy could be. There is little of lightness in the story, and no touch of humour. It reflects the stern, unflinching spirit in which our forefathers went out to do battle against those natural forces—the cold, the darkness, the storm, the raging sea—which it was their daily business to meet and conquer. Their living must be wrested from merciless, unsleeping foes as the treasure-hoard was wrested from the dragon.

The character of Beowulf is founded upon a real historical personage, Bothvari Biarki, a thane of Hygelac, King of the Geats.

MORE than fifteen hundred years ago a king named Hrothgar ruled over a little kingdom by the North Sea. His people were called the Scyldings, from Scyld his grandfather,

Beowulf

who had established the kingdom, and they were a race of warriors, hardy and bold. Their land was bleak and wind-swept, with long stretches of dreary marsh ; the soil was poor and unfruitful, so that men had to labour hard to produce even a scanty crop. But Hrothgar loved his country and was proud of it, and it seemed to him a fine thing to be King of such a land.

He had a great store of riches, for his father and his grandfather had gone out in their ships, conquered the countries round about, and forced their leaders to pay tribute, and he himself in his early years had been a great warrior and won much spoil. But now age was coming on, and he began to think how he could best use his treasure to bring glory to his country and happiness to his people. It came into his mind to build a great hall, larger and finer than any that had been built before, so that its fame might go through all lands. At once skilled workmen from all parts of the land were called together, and the building was begun.

In those days, in the Northlands where Hrothgar lived, the halls of kings were not at all like the palaces that were built in later times. They were large one-storied buildings, with walls of wood and roofs of shingle, gabled, and ornamented with fine carving. Small rooms, lower than the hall, were built against its walls to serve as bedchambers and private apartments for the king and his family, but there were not many of these, and the great hall was by far the most important part of the building. Inside, its walls were hung with the beautiful, many-coloured embroideries for which the Teutonic tribes were famous. At one end was a slightly raised platform where the king sat with the most honoured of his guests, and round the walls were placed cushioned benches for the warriors. When the time for the banquet came tables were set out on trestles ; at night these were cleared away and the warriors, wrapt in their cloaks, lay down on the benches and on the floor to sleep. So the hall was really a common living and sleeping room for the whole *comitatus*, as the special body of warriors attached to the king's service was called.

The walls of Hrothgar's hall rose daily higher, and soon it

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was finished. The King called it 'Heorot' (which means 'the Hart'), because two antlers decorated its gables, which were overlaid with shining gold. When the light fell upon it it gleamed like a new and glorious sun in the midst of the grey land. Never had any man seen a hall so great and so splendid.

On the day that it was finished Hrothgar made a great feast, and when the banquet was over the gleemen sang their songs, telling of the brave deeds done by the forefathers of the Scyldings in the days gone by. Then Hrothgar's beautiful wife Wealhtheow handed the golden mead-cup to the brave warriors and the King distributed gifts—cups and bracelets of gold, and war-birnies and weapons. There was mirth and laughter in Heorot that night, and the warriors lay down to sleep when the merry-making was over, tired and happy.



JEWELLED VIKING BROOCH
British Museum

The chief of them was called Grendel, and him the Scyldings so dreaded that they dared not go near the lonely marsh where he made his home.

In his home among the slime of the fens Grendel heard the sounds of joy that came night after night from Heorot, and, hating that men should be happy, he came, when darkness had fallen over the land, to spy out the cause of their gladness. Stalking grimly over the land, he reached Heorot soon after the warriors had laid down to rest. He strode to the lofty door and looked in. There they lay, splendid in their strength and beauty, sleeping calmly with their weapons around them.

Night after night the feasting and mirth went on, and then a terrible thing happened that changed all the joy to mourning. In the dreary marshlands of Hrothgar's country there lived a race of grim and terrible beings, demons in the form of men. They were huger than giants, loathsome to look upon, and hateful in their cruelty.

Beowulf

Then the fiend in horrible malice stretched forth his huge claw-like arm, and his long nails tore the flesh of the warriors as he grasped one after another, thirty in all ; and laughing in hideous glee he bore them away to his dark home, to feast on their mangled bodies.

In the morning the rest of the warriors awoke. None of them had heard the coming of Grendel in the night, and when they saw the empty places, where the boards were drenched with blood, they made a loud outcry of grief and horror. Hrothgar was aroused, and came to the hall, and the old King stood among the mourning throng, his head bowed in bitter sorrow. The thanes whom he loved had died horribly at the hands of a dread enemy. The tracks marked with blood that led from Heorot told who that enemy was ; and the sounds of lamentation rose louder, for all knew that against Grendel no man could hope to struggle. Their comrades must remain unavenged.

The days went on, and again and again when the shadows of night had fallen Grendel came striding over the misty moors to Heorot and carried off his prey ; till no man, not even the bravest among the warriors, would sleep in Hrothgar's splendid, gold-decked hall, and it stood every night lonely and deserted.

For twelve years these dreadful visits went on, and there was mourning through all the land that had once been so happy. The old King grieved that he could do nothing to help the people he loved, and the warriors sorrowed for their comrades who had met so terrible a fate. They prayed for help to their gods, and offered sacrifices, but no answer came, and no one could think of any plan to rid them of their horrible enemy.

Then one day the warden of Hrothgar's kingdom, keeping guard on a headland, saw a beautiful gleaming ship drawing near over the waters. It was one of the Viking dragon-ships with a curved prow, and it sped like a bird across the waves. Within, the warden saw men in shining armour, and as he watched he saw them run their ship upon the beach and prepare to make it fast.

Mindful of his duty, he turned his horse and rode in haste toward them. " Who are you that come in the garb of warriors to the country of Hrothgar ? " he cried. " Mighty men of war

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you seem, and one of you mightier than the rest, a noble leader, if his looks speak true. Speak, and say quickly by what right you bear arms in the land of the Scyldings."

Then the leader, whose name was Beowulf, stepped forward, tall and comely in his war-birnie. His helmet was ornamented with a graven boar, gold-decked and finely fashioned, which seemed to keep stern guard above his young, proud face.



THE PROW OF A
VIKING SHIP
From the Oseberg ship

"We are Geats, the thanes of King Hygelac," he said, "and, for me, my father was the noble Ecgtheow who reigned over the Geats. We come not as foes, though we bear armour and weapons, but to help Hrothgar in his sore trouble. For we have heard in our own country that a fiend, grim and horrible, has become a terror by night to the brave Scyldings and has made desolate the great hall, Heorot, that Hrothgar has built. It may be that we can show him a way by which he can be delivered from this fiend. Take us to your lord that we may talk with him."

"Your words are fair," the warden answered, "but there is much difference between words and works. I believe you come in friendship, but Hrothgar must judge. My men will see that your ship comes to no harm, and I will take you to where you may see the King."

The warden turned his horse, and Beowulf and his companions, proud in their gleaming armour, strode after him until they came in sight of the great hall, its gabled roof shining in the sun. Then their guide left them, bidding them God-speed in their errand.

Up the cobbled street they went, their armour clanging, their bright shields borne proudly upon their arms. "Whence come you, you men of valiant bearing, with your gleaming shields, your grey battle-sarks, and your grim helmets?" cried thethane who guarded the door of Heorot.



THE WARDEN CHALLENGES BEOWULF
Evelyn Paul

Beowulf

"We are Geats, hearth-comrades of Hygelac," answered Beowulf, "and we will tell our errand to Hrothgar, if he will see us."

Word was brought to Hrothgar where he sat in the hall, his band of eorls around him.

"I knew King Ecgtheow, and this Beowulf I knew as a child," he said, "and I have heard from those who have visited his land that he is strong, and his hand-grip has the strength of that of thirty men. Bring him to me and speak fitting words of welcome."

So Beowulf and his men were bidden to enter, and they strode up the hall and stood before Hrothgar.

"Hail to thee, Hrothgar!" cried Beowulf. "I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow and thane to Hygelac. We have heard in our land how a foul fiend comes nightly to Heorot, so that the hall stands empty and none may take their rest within it. I am come to destroy this fiend, as in my own land I have destroyed monsters, eotens and nickers, striving by night with them in the waves, and in the morning returning bloodstained and victorious from the fight. So now I ask of you this priceless boon. Grant that I and my warriors may keep guard in Heorot to-night. I with my single hand, weaponless, will encounter this Grendel, for since he comes unarmed I will lay aside my sword and my shield and with the hand-grip only will strive against him. It may be that I shall fall, and he will bear away my body and devour it in his dark lair. Then, I pray you, send to Hygelac my war-sark and tell him of my fate."

Hrothgar, eager to seize on this hope of rescue from his sore trouble, accepted gladly the young thane's offer, praising his father and lamenting over the harm that the monster Grendel had wrought. A feast was made in the hall, and the Geats sat down beside the Scyldings. Songs were sung, and there was great talk of high deeds done by heroes of both nations. There was laughter and merriment, and Wealhtheow the Queen, in her deckings of gold, bore the mead first to the King and then to the warriors.

When she came to Beowulf she spoke to him graciously, and

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gave him thanks for coming to the aid of her people in their distress. Then Hrothgar arose and handed over the hall into Beowulf's keeping.

"Never since I might lift hand or shield have I given my house over in trust to any man save now to thee. Have now and hold this fairest of dwellings, make known your might, watch against the foe. No lack shall there be of gifts worth the having if you come forth with your life from this mighty task."

The King led his warriors from the hall, and Beowulf and his band remained on guard. The young thane took off his birnie and his helmet and laid by his richly chased sword, giving them in charge to one of his followers. He set a guard to watch for the coming of Grendel, and then lay down and fell asleep.

The hall was dim and silent, and outside night covered the land. After a time the guard, all save one man, slept; then, out from the mists of the moorland, Grendel came striding. On he came and laid his hideous hands on the door, fastened with iron bands; it gave way, and he entered, a foul and ugly presence in that shining, beautiful place.

His wicked eyes gleamed as he saw the throng of goodly warriors, and he laughed a cruel laugh, for he thought that here was a feast prepared. Quickly he seized a sleeping thane, tore him limb from limb, and greedily ate up the body.

Next he turned toward the place where Beowulf lay; but the brave young thane was aroused, and though he had not been able to save his comrade he was ready to avenge his death. The fiend reached for him with his claw, but Beowulf grasped the claw firmly, and threw himself forward with his whole weight on Grendel's arm. Then began a mighty struggle. The monster tried in vain to free himself from Beowulf's grasp. He felt his fingers crack in that hard grip, and he screamed aloud in his pain and his anger.

Still Beowulf held on, and the fiend, frightened to find one of human kind that could oppose him, thought only of retreat. All through the hall the fight raged. Benches were overturned and broken, and it seemed as if the walls themselves must fall

Beowulf

as the two were hurled against them in their fierce struggle. Beowulf's followers, uttering loud battle cries, joined in the fray, and tried to pierce the monster with their swords; but they could not even prick his skin, for he had laid a spell on all weapons so that they could not harm him. Only the hand-grip availed.

Grendel's shrieks and roars as, maddened with pain, he vainly tried to free himself from that grasp of iron were heard afar off outside the hall. A shuddering crowd of warriors gathered by the door, listening to those awful cries which grew louder and wilder as the fiend felt the sinews part, the bones crack. A great gaping wound appeared, and streams of blood flowed out. The monstrous arm and shoulder remained in Beowulf's grasp, and Grendel, mortally wounded, fled away to his dark hiding-place to die.

Then the warriors crowded into the hall, full of praises and thanksgiving, and as soon as morning came they followed the track of Grendel as far as the mere where the nickers, foul water-spirits, dwelt. Its waters were stained with blood that seethed and boiled, and they knew that here Grendel had found his last refuge, and laid down his wicked life.

Back they came rejoicing, all praising Beowulf and telling of his great deeds, while the minstrels began to make a lay about the killing of Grendel. When evening came they gathered in the mead hall. Hrothgar came with his company and the Queen with her train of women, and the lord of the people gave thanks to Beowulf that he had freed them from the terror which had so long oppressed them. All looked with wonder on the monstrous hand of the fiend, with its strong nails, like great barbs of steel, and they marvelled that mortal man could have withstood its cruel grip.

A great feast was made, and Hrothgar gave Beowulf a golden standard, an embroidered banner, a helmet, a birnie, a treasure sword, and eight steeds, their trappings overlaid with gold. To his men also the King gave rich gifts, and when the feast was over and the minstrels had sung their songs, the Queen, when she bore the wine-cup, laid her gifts also before the victor—a coat of mail, two arm jewels, and a collar of precious stones.

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Gleefully they prepared for rest, for they feared no longer any terror in the night. Beowulf did not remain in the hall, for Hrothgar had directed another resting-place to be prepared for him, but the rest of the Geats were there, with many of the Scyldings.

But the terror was not over. When all had laid down to sleep in security, with no guard set, there came another fiend to Heorot. This was Grendel's mother, a cruel and hateful water-fiend, who dwelt in the mere by the marsh, and came now to avenge the death of her son. She was not as huge as he, nor as strong, but she was as loathsome and as wicked. She came in fierce and angry mood, and strode into the hall. Some of the warriors saw her come, and quickly the alarm spread. Men sprang up in haste and seized their shields and their weapons, but the hideous visitor stayed but an instant. She took in her clutch a sleeping warrior, named Æschere, a man very dear to the King, and before anyone could attack her she swiftly made her way back to the fen.

Then arose a terrible outcry, and men ran to tell the dread news to Hrothgar and Beowulf. Quickly they rose from sleep and came to Heorot, and the King mourned over his lost thane, telling of his wise and valiant deeds.

"Dead is Æschere, my counsellor and adviser who stood shoulder to shoulder with me on the field of battle. The murderous demon has avenged her son. Seek her out, Beowulf, I beseech you, for in you lies our only hope. Her home is not far from this place, in a dark and lonely mere, overhung by thick trees. It is a fearsome spot which even the animals of the forest shun, but there must you go if indeed you would free us from our troubles."

"Grieve not," replied Beowulf, "I will go. It is better to avenge the death of a friend than to mourn for him. I promise you the fiend shall not escape me."

Then Hrothgar thanked God who had sent him such a helper, and he, with Beowulf and his Geats and a body of most trusted warriors among the Scyldings, set out to follow the fiend to her lair. Through steep and dreadful ways they went, and where

Beowulf

dark trees leaned over the edge of a beetling cliff they found the head of *Æschere* mangled and stained with blood.

Below the cliff lay the mere, its dark waters blood-stained and troubled. It seethed and bubbled, and strange beasts of the snake and the dragon kind swam in its waves. It was a dreadful place, but here they knew the fiend they had come to seek would be found.

Beowulf put on his armour, his birnie, and his helmet, and took in his hand the famous sword, *Hrunting*, which had been lent to him by one of *Hrothgar's* nobles. He begged the King to befriend his followers if he should never return, and then he sprang boldly into the black, seething waters.

For a whole day he sank, down and still farther down, and when he reached the bottom the grim fiend was waiting for him. She seized him in her claws, but she could not pierce the goodly battle-sark that protected him. She bore him to her den, the den where she had lived for fifty years, and as they went strange beasts crowded round them, hemming them in so that Beowulf could not use his weapons.

At last he found himself in a hall, roofed and free from water and water-creatures, where a flashing fire shone. He raised his sword and struck a blow at the horrid she-fiend, but its edge could not pierce her. In disgust he flung away his weapon, trusting to the hand-grip which had served him so well before. He took her by the shoulder and they wrestled fiercely, till she fell; but she laid hold of him, and he tripped and fell also. Then she seized her dagger, and would have killed him, but again his war-sark saved his life. He freed himself from her grasp, and as he stood erect his eyes lighted on a stately sword that hung upon the wall. It was mightier than any wielded by mortal, and in his desperate plight the hero snatched it from its place. This time the sea-woman's magic could not avail; the sword was more potent than her spells, and the furious blow which Beowulf dealt stretched her dead at his feet.

Then he looked around him. He saw the body of *Grendel* lying lifeless on a bed, and he smote it with the giant sword and cut off its head. With this in his hand he left the hall, and

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he saw as he went that the blade had begun to melt, like ice when it is near a fire, because of the hot, poisonous blood of the monsters he had killed. Soon only the hilt was left, and holding that firmly he swam upward toward the shore.

Here, since he had disappeared under the water, his comrades had eagerly awaited him, and as time had gone on they had almost despaired of seeing him again. Hrothgar and his warriors had gone sorrowfully home, but Beowulf's own little band would not give up hope. They still watched and waited.

All at once they saw him, swimming strongly through the water, and bearing a heavy burden. They rushed to meet him, drew him to land, loosened his helmet and his birnie. Fearfully they looked at the head that he bore, and the sword whose blade the hot blood had melted. Then they left the mere, where the water no longer seethed and bubbled, and went joyfully back to Heorot, four of them bearing Grendel's head.

So Beowulf's adventure was happily fulfilled, and he was free to go back to his own land. Hrothgar gave him many other rich gifts and sorrowed greatly at parting from him. Then Beowulf and his men embarked in the ship that had brought them thither, and sailed back to the land of the Geats.

Hygelac received his famous thane with joy, and listened eagerly to the tale of his adventures, and Beowulf gladly laid down the gifts that Hrothgar had given him before his lord; and Hygelac gave him weapons and armour and money, and a hall, and a prince's high place in exchange.

For several years Beowulf lived as Hygelac's loyal subject, and then, when the King died, the people chose him to reign over them; and there began a time of glory and prosperity for the Geats under their great leader. No enemy dared come near the land where Beowulf reigned; they knew too well how he could guard his country, and how his foes would certainly fall before him.

So for fifty years there was peace in the land of the Geats. The young King grew to be a man of ripe years, wise in counsel, and ruling his people with justice and with mercy. Then age came slowly upon him, his hair whitened, the strength of his

Beowulf

mighty arm was not what it was in the days when, by his hand-grip only, he had torn the shoulder from Grendel, and reft him of his life. Yet still Beowulf was a warrior; his spirit was high and his courage unabated; he held his head proudly, and his clear, undaunted eyes kept tireless watch for any foe that might cross his borders. But none came; for the terror of his name, in his age as in his youth, was like a great wall that guarded the land.

At last when the King was old and spent, and his life was nearly done, there arose an enemy, not from the lands outside, but within his own kingdom. On a lone heath, high above the Geats' city, there had been for long years—hundreds of years, men said—a great stone cairn. It had been raised, so the story went, above a marvellous store of treasure that a solitary man, the last of his race, had hidden there long ago. He had caused a great cave to be made to hold his riches, and a cairn to be built on top of it, and he had left his treasure there, saying, "Hold now, O earth, since no kin have I that may do so, this wealth of eorls. None have I that may wield sword, or burnish the gold-decked vessel or the drinking-cup of price; lie there, hard helmet, bedight with gold, and ring-meshed war-birnie. They sleep who should have taken delight in my treasure." So, sorrowfully, the warrior left his hoard, and death, which had taken all his kindred, at length laid hold on him also.

Then there came a great dragon, who flew by night through the air, with the flames he had breathed out making a fiery, dreadful ring around his evil body. He found the treasure and took it for his own, and on the pile of stones above it he lived, guarding it through hundreds of years. Men shuddered when they saw from afar off that dark spot on the high heath, and none dared tread the secret path that led toward it. So the years went on, and the fiery dragon was not disturbed, but held sway over the little desert kingdom around the cairn.

All through Beowulf's long reign he held it, until the King had grown old. Then one day there came a man fleeing in deadly terror from his lord, whom he had angered. He thought only of escaping the death that was threatening him, and cared

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not where he went ; and running wildly he came upon that secret path. Down it he fled, and his pursuer came no farther, but turned, leaving him to his fate. Mad with terror the man reached the cairn and fell breathless beside it ; then, with shuddering dismay, he saw the huge dragon stretched out hideous on the stones.

Here was death waiting for him, a death more horrible than that he had escaped ; yet he could flee no farther, so must abide the stroke. The dragon did not move, and soon the wretched, trembling fugitive saw that he was asleep. Not often were those watchful eyes closed even for a minute, but now a deep sleep had fallen upon him, and he had not heard or seen the intruder.

The man raised himself to flee while there was time ; then, as he looked round, he saw a gleam of gold from under the stones of the cairn. Breathless, he looked into the hole beneath the pile. He saw treasure such as he had never dreamed of, gold heaped on gold, gleaming gems, fine work of smiths burnished and splendid. A thought came to him. Shaking with terror, he put out his hand and seized a shining, golden cup ; then down that terrible secret path he ran once more, on and on until he



SCANDINAVIAN BOX-BROOCH
British Museum

came to the palace of his lord and fell before him, laying at his feet his peace-offering—the dragon's cup.

Eagerly the lord received it, and, forgetting his servant's offence, bade him tell how he had come by such a treasure ; and the man told the story of the dragon's hoard, and how he had despoiled him while he slept.

The tale went round, and men looked on the cup and planned

Beowulf

how they might obtain more of the precious hoard. But when night fell they thought no more of gold for the terror that came upon them. The dragon had awakened. He had found that a thief had been there while he slept, and he raged furiously round about the cairn, seeking for traces of the despoiler. While daylight lasted he searched and thundered, and when night fell he prepared for vengeance.

He came forth, flames darting round about him, and the horrified people below saw that high heath blazing with fearful light. Then they saw the hideous body of the dragon rise in the air and, roaring horribly, descend to the plains beneath. He passed over a homestead standing quiet and peaceful amid its green fields, and as he passed he darted out a great tongue of fire. In a moment the fierce flames caught it, and it blazed up, to sink in black desolation. Round the township he flew, and the stricken people saw the great fires rise behind him. He came to the hall of Beowulf, a fair house that the people had built and adorned as a gift for their King, and on that too he did his wicked will, so that its beauty and its treasures were all consumed away. Then, ere the dawn came, he went in savage contentment back to his place.

Fierce anger rose in Beowulf's breast as he looked round and saw black ashes where before had been the peaceful homes of his people, and a heap of ruins where had stood his own fair gift house. He feared that he had angered the Eternal Lord, and therefore this punishment had come upon him, and in deep grief and penitence he prayed that his sin might be forgiven. Yet he determined to avenge his people.

As he had in his youth fought single-handed with the monster Grendel, so he resolved now to go out alone against this dragon of the cairn. He called cunning workmen and bade them make him a shield of iron, for he knew that wood, however stout, would not avail him against this fire-breathing beast. He sent for the man who had stolen the cup and bade him act as guide, and the man, trembling and fearful, dared not refuse to do the King's will.

Then Beowulf chose eleven of his thanes to go with him to

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the lair of the fire-drake. Sadly he said good-bye to his hearth-comrades, knowing that he should see them no more. He did not go this time, as he had gone to the adventure with Grendel, high in hope, and trusting to return in triumph, but sadly, as a man old and weary goes to a task that will bring his life to an end. Yet not one whit of his courage had left him. His heart was as stout as in those far-off days when he had delivered the land of Hrothgar from the evil one, and received high honour for his deeds, so that his name became great among men.

With his band of thanes he followed the guide, until the lair of the dragon was very near. Then he stopped, and clasped once more the hands of his dear comrades.

"Now go I," he said, "to meet this dragon, my sword in my hand. I bore no weapons against Grendel, but against fire the hand-grip cannot prevail. I will have upon me shield and birnie to be my protection, but it may well be that fate will give me death instead of victory. Stay ye here and abide the end."

Then he went forward against the dragon. The monster stood by an arch of stone and sent out great flames, so that the stream that ran down by the barrow grew hot and the air scorched and singed any who drew near. With a mighty cry Beowulf sprang forward; the dragon coiled its loathsome body, ready to fall upon its enemy. The King stood stedfast, and, as the great beast came writhing on, he lifted his sword and struck at it with all his might. But the stroke was not such as Beowulf had been wont to give, and though it struck sorely on the evil creature, it left his life and his strength still in him. Fiercely he sent out his deadly fire, and the King felt his force failing, and knew that his end was at hand. Yet he stood up bravely, scorched and faint as he was, and awaited the foul beast's onset.

Meanwhile his followers, standing aloof, looked with horror and dismay upon the raging beast, and when they saw him raise his head once more after the King's stroke had failed they judged the battle lost. They turned to flee for shelter to the woods lest the victor should pursue them—all except one young, untried thane named Wiglaf, a kinsman of the King's. He

Beowulf

stood firm, and spoke hot and angry words when he saw the others ready to desert their leader.

"Is not this our King, who gave us rings and gifts in the mead hall? Did he not choose us from all his people to go with him in this adventure, deeming us the bravest and most faithful? Let us go now and help him and shield his body from the cruel flame. Shame shall it be to us if we go home unscathed, having left our King to die. I would liefer the fire burnt my body than his, and my shield and my arm shall guard him while my strength lasts."

But the others would not listen to the young thane. They fled to the woods, sheltering among the trees. Then Wiglaf took his weapon and went through the scorching heat and the smoke and stood at his lord's side.

"Dear Beowulf, now do this last deed well, even as the deeds of your youth. Let not your glory depart now, but strike with all your might. I will help you as I can."

On came the dragon in terrible wrath, the fierce flames playing about him. In a moment the shield of Wiglaf was utterly consumed, but, undismayed, he sheltered himself behind the great iron shield of his lord, and stood steadfast, facing the great beast. Once more Beowulf smote with all his might. His sword pierced the dragon's head, and made a fearful wound, but his failing strength could not drive it home. The creature roared in rage and pain, but its strength was as great as ever. On he came for the third time, sprang at Beowulf, and fixed his teeth in his throat so that the blood gushed out.

At that Wiglaf smote the beast a great blow in the side, making a gaping wound, and after that he weakened, and the flames came more feebly. Then Beowulf with a last terrible effort gathered the strength that was so fast failing him. With his dagger he struck this time, and cut that foul body through the middle, so that it fell in two.

The fight was over, but the victor sank down near to death. The poison which had entered his throat by the dragon's teeth spread through his body. Wiglaf, the faithful thane, knew that his lord was dying. Very tenderly he bore him to a resting-place

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by the wall, and loosed his helmet, and laved his pale face with water from the stream. A little strength came back to Beowulf, and he spoke faintly : " Now is my day on earth over, and death comes fast. No son have I to whom I may give my sword and shield, and who shall take my place in the kingdom I have ruled for fifty years? Safely have I kept it, guarding it from enemies, not by treachery or by slaughter, but by my strength and courage. Therefore at the last, when the dark hour is come, I have joy."

Then he turned to the young thane, " Go quickly, dear Wiglaf, and fetch the treasure from its hiding-place, that I may see the fair gold and the bright jewels before I die."

So Wiglaf left his lord, and, going quickly, entered under the roof of the barrow. There he saw a great chamber all shining with treasures of gold. Cups and platters, jars and curious vessels, finely wrought and set with gems ; arm-rings and chains wondrously fashioned, helmets, old and rusted swords that had lain for a thousand years in the earth ; war-birnies, the cunning work of smiths ; shields that had been borne by warriors long since dead, and above, a standard of gold hanging high over the hoard.

But Wiglaf scarce stayed to glance at these treasures. He gathered up a hasty armful, and then, staggering under his burden, hurried back. Beowulf still breathed, though his life was almost gone. Once more Wiglaf laved his face with water, and the King opened his eyes, looked upon the treasure, and spoke :

" Now go I in peace to my home, having laid down my life for my people. Bid my warriors build me a fair mound high on the headland that is called Whale's Ness, so that seafarers hereafter who drive their deep ships afar over the floods may see it, and call it ' Beowulf's Barrow.' "

With feeble fingers he loosed the golden circlet from his neck and gave it to his young kinsman.

" Take it, take my helm and my birnie. You are the last of my kinsmen. All the rest has Death taken from me. Now go I where they have gone."



GRENDL SEIZES THE WARRIORS

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BEOWULF SMITES OFF GRENDL'S HEAD

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Beowulf

He laid down his brave head and his soul went forth from his body to find the reward that awaits him who has lived steadfast in the right.

Then Wiglaf stood alone between his dead King and the grisly dragon, while on the scorched and blackened earth were scattered the treasures of shining gold ; and his heart was sore within him for the loss of his lord. Once more he cast cool water on the loved face, hoping that the King might yet revive and speak again ; but the lips remained silent, and Wiglaf knew he would hear no more words from his master.

The ten cowards now came creeping back from the wood, and gazed silently with shamed faces on the King to whom they had played the traitor. Wiglaf looked sorrowfully at them.

" So, here is he whom you betrayed, your lord who has done you much kindness. He trusted you, and you left him. 'Twas a shameful deed. Now for you there shall be no more gifts ; your joys and your substance shall fail ; your land shall be taken from you when the Prince shall hear of your infamous deed. Death is better for every eorl than a life of dishonour."

Then Wiglaf sent a message to tell those who were waiting and watching in the city below of the death of their King, and there was great mourning. Many eorls came to the place of death, and stood with tears gazing on the woeful sight—the dead King, and his dead foe, the loathly dragon, the black earth, and the shining treasure. Wiglaf told them his story, and how the King had bidden his warriors build him a giant barrow on the Whale's Ness.

" Let us now haste," he said, " to search out the heaped-up treasure that is beneath the stones. I will guide you so that you may see where it is hidden. Let the bier be ready when we come forth, and let us bear our lord to his resting-place in the Mighty One's keeping."

So the folks were sent far and near to fetch wood to make a great pile whereon the body of the King should be burned, and Wiglaf, with seven of the most trusty thanes, went into the treasure-chamber and bore out the golden store. Then they thrust the body of the dragon over the cliff into the sea.

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The treasure was piled up on a wagon and taken away to the Whale's Ness. Then reverently the thanes took up the body of their lord and bore it thither also, and laid it down upon the great pile of wood that had been gathered. They fired the wood, and great wreaths of black smoke arose, with bright tongues of flame between. A great crowd stood round weeping, and the sound of their mourning mingled with the noise of the fire as the flames gathered strength and went roaring up toward heaven.

Then for ten days they worked building a great burial mound, and in it they placed all the gold and jewels that had been taken from the dragon's hoard.

So the Geat-folk, his hearth-comrades, grieved for their lord ; they said that he was a king like to none other in the world, the mildest and most gracious to men, the most friendly to his people, and most eager to win praise.

CHAPTER VI

RUSTEM

THE story of Rustem transports us, as on the Magic Carpet, to the vast spaces of Central Asia, and the barbaric surroundings of Oriental state—a very different world from that in which Beowulf strove and died. Our story is only an episode in the Persian epic, the *Shah Nameh*, or “Book of Shahs,” but Rustem gathers to himself the exalted qualities which shine out vividly in the records of those early monarchs and their nobles, and he is the heart and centre of the whole. The world of his exploits was a very colourful one, reflecting the Persians’ love of gorgeous fabrics, sweet-smelling flowers, flashing jewels, shady trees, cool streams, bright sunshine, and glowing shadow, and we may compare the picture with the rude and rugged setting of the Beowulf saga.

Other epics were fashioned from streams and runlets of lore and tradition which flowed and trickled none knows whence, but the *Shah Nameh* was woven by Firdausi of a vast collection of popular tales and legends entrusted to him in A.D. 976 by the Shah Mahmoud. The collection had been commenced in the sixth century by the Shah Naushirwan and continued by many others, so that the material was ready to Firdausi’s hand, and from this rich store sprang the poem of nearly 60,000 verses which was immediately to take its place as the national epic of the race.

If it be true that the epic reveals the mind and soul of the people from whom it springs, it is evident that the ancient Persians admired courage, loyalty, and all the other primitive virtues which distinguish the heroes of every epic. But there is one outstanding quality in the poem which links it with the thought and feelings of our own time and which differentiates

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the epic from others—laughter and tears of common humanity. Nowhere in the entire range of modern literature do we find a situation of deeper pathos than that in which Rustem recognizes the son of whose existence he had until that tragic moment been unaware.

We feel that the curtain of the epic is fitly rung down upon the death of Sohrab, and we have little further interest in the "captains and the kings" of Persia. Their records might be fitly ended in these words of another Persian poet :

Lo ! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of all their vintage prest,
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

THERE lived once in Persia a very wise and noble warrior whose name was Zal. He had been white-haired from birth, and his father, Sahm, believing that this betokened some great calamity to his house, had carried him to a mountain and left him there to die. But Allah had willed otherwise, and the babe was carried off by a supernatural creature, the Simurgh, to its nest, and this creature nourished him until he was ready to seek his fortune in the world. The Shah of Persia, the good Minuchir, loved him dearly, and honoured him above all his other nobles ; and when a son was born to Zal Minuchir rejoiced to think that here was another hero who would serve his country in the years to come as devotedly as his father had done before him. This boy, when he was a day old, was as big and strong as a one year's child, and every year his stature and his strength increased so marvellously that through all the land men spoke with wonder of Rustem, the son of Zal.

When he was ten years old Rustem was awakened one night by a loud noise. He sat up and listened ; it seemed to him that the palace walls shook with the roaring of some great beast. He sprang from his bed and rushed out into the courtyard, and there he saw a crowd of frightened men, who ran hither and thither, not knowing what to do.

Rustem

"What has happened?" asked Rustem; "what is the reason of all this noise and confusion?"

"The Shah's white elephant has broken loose," answered a man, who trembled as he spoke; "it is rushing through the city trampling down all whom it can reach."

Not a word spoke Rustem, but ran back into his father's house to fetch his club. The officers and servants, seeing what he was about to do, barred the door that he might not be able to get out, but he struck a mighty blow with his club, and the door flew in splinters before him. Away he rushed to where a terrified crowd, that had been driven into one of the city squares from which there was no escape, shrieked and struggled as the elephant trampled in among them.

Rustem made his way to the front of the great beast and gave a loud shout. The creature turned, and lifted his huge trunk to seize and crush the daring boy. At the same moment Rustem raised his club and brought it down upon the elephant's head with such force that the skull cracked and the great beast sank down and died. Then Rustem went quickly back to his home and to his bed, and was soon fast asleep once more.

After this Zal saw that his son must no longer be treated as a child, but as a young warrior ready for great deeds. Rustem himself longed to give up his easy life at home and go out with his father to battle.

"Give me," he entreated, "the club that belonged to my grandfather Sahn, and a horse, and then let me fight against the enemies of my country."



ZAL AND THE SIMURGH

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So Zal gave him the club, and then caused all the horses that he possessed to be led out and brought one after another before his son.

"Choose which one you will have," he said, and Rustem laid his hand heavily on the back of each horse as it passed to test its strength. Horse after horse fell to the ground and was rejected, until at last came a strong young mare followed by her colt, which had the chest and shoulders of a mighty lion and whose colour was mingled rose and saffron.

"This," said Rustem, "is the horse for me"; and he took a rope and made a noose to catch the colt.

"Do not touch it," cried the grooms; "the mare has already killed seven men who have tried to seize her colt."

Rustem paid no heed to their warnings, but threw the noose, and held fast to it while the mare bit his arm and struck at him with her mighty forefeet. He clenched his fist and gave her a great blow on the neck, so that she fell to the ground. Then he led away the colt, and set to work to tame it and make it do his will. It was a long labour, but it was done at last. Rakush, as he named the colt, became devoted to his master, and did him faithful service for many years.

While Rustem was still a youth the old Shah Minuchir died, and there was much trouble and years of fighting before at last Kai Kobad won the throne. In all the fighting Rustem took a valiant part, and when, after a short reign, Kai Kobad died and was succeeded by his son, Kai Kaoos, Rustem, now a grown warrior, became the first man in the land and the Shah's right hand.

Kai Kaoos was young and filled with pride at the thought of the great and splendid kingdom that was under his rule, and so he grew proud and haughty, and would not listen to the advice of his wise counsellors, but thought that his will should be set above all the wisdom of the earth. Then the Evil Ones, who are always on the watch to ruin mortals, saw this, and laid a snare for him. One of them took upon himself the form of a singer, and came to the Shah as he sat in his garden drinking wine among his nobles. Very sweetly the minstrel sang, so

Rustem

that all the company listened intently, and the songs that he sang were all about the beautiful city of Mazinderan.

"Mazinderan is the bower of spring and of all loveliness. There is no heat or cold within her boundaries, but the sweet air sheds health and fragrance. Everywhere grow bright tulips and many-coloured hyacinths; the nightingale sings in every bush, pouring his glorious lay into the still night air. There each streamlet is formed of the dew from roses, and beautiful maidens wander happily in that blissful spot. True it is that he who has never seen Mazinderan has never tasted of delight."

When the proud and foolish Shah heard these words he stood up and cried aloud, "I will go to this beautiful city and take it for my own."

His words brought dismay to his followers, for all knew how dangerous such an expedition would be and feared the terrible misfortunes it must bring. But it was useless to try to dissuade the vain and wilful Kai Kaoos.

"He will not listen to us," said his nobles. "There is but one hope. He may perhaps listen to the wise Zal."

They sent in haste for Zal, and he came quickly upon a swift-footed camel. On his knees he besought his master to give up this wild plan, telling him that the city was a place of demons and enchanters, and that no weapons and no courage could prevail against them. But he could not move the stubborn Shah. Kai Kaoos gathered a great army, left Zal in charge of his kingdom, and marched away toward Mazinderan in the highest spirits.

But spirits failed and courage faded during the long, toilsome march of six months that followed, and when the borders of Mazinderan were at last reached the Shah had grown weary and dispirited and disposed to avenge his sufferings upon the people of the land. He gave orders that every man, woman, and child that his army met during its march to the city was to be put to death. "Kill," he commanded, "and spare none."

So ruin and destruction followed the march of Kai Kaoos, and soon the news of what was being done reached the ears of the King of Mazinderan and the great White Demon who was

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his ally. They plotted together as to how they could best deal with the invader, and devised a most terrible plan. They waited until Kai Kaoos was within a day's march of the city, and was pressing eagerly on, fired by the reports his spies had brought him that Mazinderan was even fairer and more to be desired than the singer had told him. Then, when he had encamped for the night, the Demon, by magic arts, brought a darkness that was like a cloud of pitch over the Persian host, and sent a terrific fall of enormous hailstones which killed many of the warriors and threw the whole army into the wildest confusion. Worst of all, when morning dawned it brought no light to the unhappy Persians, for every one of them, from Kai Kaoos to his humblest follower, had been stricken blind.

Seven days they wept and lamented their unhappy fate, and on the eighth day the miserable Shah cried out in his anguish, "Oh, Zal, wisest of men, why did I not listen when you warned me?"

Then from out of the darkness that lay round about came the terrible voice of the White Demon, "Oh, foolish Shah!" it said, "have you not heard of the power of the White Demon, who can charm the stars of heaven? Your mad will has been obeyed, and destruction has come upon you and your followers. You shall indeed dwell in the pleasant land you coveted, but you shall dwell as prisoners in darkness and sorrow; and of the fruit of this land shall you eat only as much as will suffice to keep the life in you."

The Shah and his unhappy followers remained in this dreadful captivity with no hope of escape, until at last Kai Kaoos contrived to persuade one of their gaolers to carry a message to Zal, who was anxiously awaiting news. When Zal heard of the terrible fate that had befallen the Persian army he forgot his anger against the Shah, and thought only of helping him in his miserable plight. He sent for Rustem and told him the sad tale.

"My son," he said, "I am too old to go to the aid of the Shah, so you must do so in my stead. Go therefore and fight bravely to rescue these unhappy men."

Rustem was eager for the adventure, and he answered quickly,

Rustem

"I go, my father. But was not Kai Kaoos six months upon the road ere he reached the borders of Mazinderan? Must I also take six months? Is there no nearer way?"

"There is indeed a nearer way," said Zal, "but it is very dangerous and difficult, being infested by lions and demons and sorcerers. By that road you may reach Mazinderan in seven days."

"That road will I take," declared Rustem, "and I will set forth without delay. Fare thee well, my father."

He leapt on his horse and set off, while his father looked proudly after him.

"Now bear me swiftly, Rakush," said Rustem. "In seven days can a horse of common breed cover the distance we have to travel; but you, my beauty, will not need seven days."

Rakush raised his head and looked at his master as if he would say, "You shall see"; and then he set himself to his task. Swift and tireless he sped on the way, and in twelve hours he had travelled a two days' journey. That night he and his master encamped in a forest and supped off the flesh of a wild ass that Rustem caught and roasted at a fire that he made of grass and dry branches. Then the master lay down to sleep while the horse grazed near by.

Soon there came a little rustling sound among the reeds. Rustem did not stir, but Rakush pricked up his ears uneasily. Out from the rushes sprang a great lion and leapt upon him, but the horse fought with teeth and hoofs and trampled the beast underfoot so that it died. The noise woke Rustem, and he saw at once how near death had come to him while he slept.

"Oh, Rakush!" he cried, "you have done ill. It is not for you to fight lions. Well do I know your bold heart, but think how your master would have fared had the beast overcome you, as well it might have done. 'Twas your duty to rouse me, not to risk your own life and mine."

Rakush hung his head, and when his master again sank to sleep he stood quite still, silent and watchful. So he stood undisturbed until morning, and then they both set off once more. That day they travelled through a vast and treeless desert where the sand seemed to scorch the feet that trod upon it. Both

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were fainting with thirst, but no spring could be found, and at last Rustem gave up searching and lay down on the sand to die.

"Send succour by some other arm to the Shah, O Allah," he prayed, "since I must perish here."

At that moment a sheep passed by him.

"Surely that sheep knows where water is to be found," thought Rustem, "for he is fat and in good case."

He staggered to his feet and followed the sheep, who led him straight to a fount of cool, sweet water.

"Rakush," called Rustem, and the poor beast came with heavy, flagging steps; but when he saw the water he put down his head and drank deep and long. Rustem drank too, the sweetest draughts he had ever tasted, and bathed his face, and the limbs of his good horse. Then he looked round for the sheep, but he was gone, and no mark of his feet was to be seen upon the sand. So Rustem knew that Allah in His mercy had sent this succour, and he went on his way, glad and thankful.

That night they supped on wild ass as before, and when Rustem lay down to sleep he charged Rakush straitly to wake him if any danger approached. The hours passed quietly until midnight, and then there came creeping out of the forest a huge dragon, a creature so horrible that even the demons were afraid of it. It came swiftly toward Rakush, and the faithful beast, mindful of his master's orders, rushed to his side, stamping and neighing loudly. Rustem sprang up and looked round him, but he could see nothing, for the monster had vanished. Then he became angry. "Why did you wake me?" he cried reproachfully to Rakush, "seeing that here is no enemy, and I am weary."

Then he lay down again, and as soon as he was asleep the watching dragon crept out once more. Again the good horse wakened Rustem and again the dragon disappeared; and yet again the same thing happened after Rustem had lain down to sleep once more. At this third false alarm he fell into a great rage, and said, "I told you to wake me if you saw a dangerous enemy, and behold you delight in depriving me of needful sleep. If you do this once more I will kill you, and will drag myself in loneliness along the road to Mazinderan."

Rustem

Poor Rakush was very unhappy at being blamed by his master, and when Rustem fell asleep once more he stood by his side, his proud head drooping mournfully. Then once more the horrible dragon appeared. What should he do? He knew he could not overcome the monster by himself, and that if he woke his master he would probably lose his own life. But if he remained quiet his master would be killed, and at that thought the brave horse did not hesitate for an instant. He struck hard at the ground so that the earth was torn up beneath his hoofs. Up sprang Rustem, and seeing no enemy drew his sword in rage against his faithful horse. But at that moment it seemed as if a great cloud lifted, and Rustem saw the horrid monster close upon him.

Then began a grim fight in which Rustem would have been overpowered had not Rakush helped him by seizing the creature's scaly hide in his teeth. The infuriated dragon turned upon him, and Rustem, taking advantage of the moment, brought his sword down on the horrid head, and the hideous creature rolled over upon the sand, quite dead.

"Come now," cried Rustem, stretching out his hand to Rakush, "well and faithfully have you served me and very ill have I requited you. Forgive me, and I will never misjudge you again."

Then very happily they continued their journey, and Rakush bore his master even more swiftly and easily than before, for his heart was light and his spirit high because of the kind and loving words that had been spoken to him.

Next evening they entered the country of the magicians. It was a lovely land where shady trees grew on the banks of cool streams, that flowed through fair, green meadows, and it seemed like Paradise to Rustem after the burning, sandy wastes he had passed. Under one of the trees was a table, and upon it was spread a delicious meal of roasted venison, bread and salt, with silver cups filled with sparkling wine. Rustem leapt from his horse eagerly and sat down to eat and drink.

When his hunger was satisfied he took up a tambourine that lay on the table, and touching it lightly he began to sing. He

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sang of the joys of battle and of how a true warrior delighted more in grim warfare than in feasting and dancing and idleness in ladies' bowers.

Now this table was really a table of the magicians, who had left it and hidden themselves when they saw Rustem approaching, and as he sang one of them, taking the shape of a beautiful woman, suddenly appeared before him. Rustem greeted her



RUSTEM SLAYS THE WITCH

courteously, and for a time they talked together. Then he poured out for her a cup of wine and gave it to her, bidding her thank Allah for the good things He had provided.

At the name of Allah the sorceress turned pale and trembled, and Rustem, with horror, saw her change from a fair maiden to a black and ugly witch-woman. He threw his noose, and held her fast, and then with a stroke of his sword he cut her body in two.

The other sorcerers who were watching fled with dreadful shrieks, and Rustem resumed his journey. By and by he came

Rustem

to a region of utter darkness, where there was to be seen neither sun, nor moon, nor star.

"Bear me where you will, good horse," he said, "for in this darkness you are liker than I to choose the safe way."

Slowly and carefully Rakush stepped, and soon came out where the bright sun shone down on a fair country, and golden corn glinted in the light. The weary Rustem slipped from his horse, lay down on a grassy bank and was soon fast asleep, while Rakush wandered into a cornfield near by to find food.

After a few minutes Rustem was awakened by a loud voice speaking threateningly in his ear. He looked up and saw a man who was angrily beating upon the ground with his stick.

"You have turned your horse into my field," he said, "and he is trampling down my young corn."

Rustem was very angry at the man's rude behaviour, and taking the fellow by the ears he pulled them from his head. Wild with terror the man ran to Aulad, the ruler of the country.

"Lo, see, a terrible man who wears a leopard skin lies yonder, and he has torn off my ears because I waked him when his horse was trampling down my corn."

Then Aulad was wroth, and gathered a band of fighting men and came quickly to the place where Rustem lay asleep.

"Who are you?" he shouted, "and how dare you do violence to a man of my country?"

Rustem rose to his feet and answered calmly, "If I told you my name the blood in your veins would freeze with fright. You have brought an army against me; see how I will deal with it."

He drew his sword, and when the men of Aulad rushed upon him he swung the blade among them with such deadly skill that soon many heads were rolling on the plain. Neither Aulad nor his men could face such an attack as this, and those who were uninjured fled in terror. Rustem pursued them, cast his noose over Aulad, and bound him securely; then as the ruler lay in terror, expecting instant death from the hand of this dread stranger, Rustem said gently:

"If you will speak the plain truth you have nothing to fear from me."

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"Truth will I speak," promised the wonder-stricken Aulad.

"Will you show me the caves of the White Demon and his followers and also the place where Kai Kaoos is imprisoned?"

"That will I do," replied Aulad.

"Be faithful, and I will make you King of Mazinderan," said Rustem; "but play me false, and I will kill you. Speak now and tell me of these hiding-places."

"The White Demon and his followers dwell in two hundred caves which lie between two dark and lofty mountains," said Aulad. "Twelve hundred of the demons keep watch by night and day. The way to these caves is long and difficult, and no man can travel along it, for a stony desert which none but demons can cross lies in the way; and beyond that is a stream that is guarded by a great host of warrior-demons."

"Lead me toward the caves," said Rustem, "and you shall see what a man can do. Your bonds shall not be loosed, and with a rope you shall be fastened to my saddle-bow till I have proved your faithfulness. But take me first to the prison of Kai Kaoos."

All day they travelled, and at midnight reached the place where the Persian army had been smitten with blindness. The air was full of noise and clamour. Fires blazed, and great lamps burned brightly on every side.

"This is Mazinderan, my lord," said Aulad, "and here the chiefs of the White Demon are gathered in council."

"We will wait till morning," said Rustem; and he tied his captive guide to a tree and lay down peacefully to sleep.

When morning came he mounted Rakush and went boldly forward; he shouted the name of the Demon chief with a great shout that made the mountain shake. Out came the chief in fierce anger, and at once Rustem seized him by his ears, tore off his head, and flung it among the crowd of demons who were gathering behind him. With awful shrieks they fled in all directions, and Rustem went calmly back to Aulad, unloosed him, and bade him lead the way to Kai Kaoos.

As they passed through the silent streets of the city Rakush neighed so loudly that the Shah in his prison heard him.

Rustem

"My troubles are at an end," he cried, "for I hear the voice of Rakush, and it tells me that help is near."

His followers thought him mad, but he insisted that Rustem was coming to their aid ; and even as he spoke the hero entered.

The men who had been so long imprisoned went almost mad with joy when they knew that they were free, but after a time the thought of the blindness from which they still suffered weighed upon their spirits once more.

"We are blind," said the Shah mournfully, "and nothing can give us back our sight save the warm blood from the heart of the White Demon dropped upon our eyes. Help us now, O noble Rustem, for none but you can face this terrible creature. Furious will he be when he learns that we have been released, and if he is not slain he will come with a mighty force against us and we shall all perish."

"I will seek him out," said Rustem ; "fear nothing." Then with Aulad as his guide he set out. With toil and suffering they crossed the desert, and Rustem vanquished the demons that guarded the river ; and when they had passed over it they came to a deep and horrible cave. From it shone a fierce light, and in this Rustem saw the forms of many black and grisly spirits moving to and fro before the cave.

"You have been a trusty and wise guide to me so far," he said to Aulad, "tell me now the best way to attack this demon host."

"Wait until noonday," counselled Aulad, "for then the demons sleep, leaving but few to keep guard."

So Rustem waited ; and when the sun was high in the heavens he took his sword, and shouting his battle-cry of "Rustem !" he sprang upon the host. Many he killed and put the others to flight, so that the way was clear before him.

"Now must I seek the great White Demon himself," he said, and warily he set out. Far over the mountain he went, and at last he saw before him an immense cavity. He gazed into it, but could see nothing except depths of pitchy blackness. Then, as he looked, the blackness gave a mighty heave, and Rustem saw that the cavern was entirely filled by a monstrous creature who lay there asleep.

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Again Rustem shouted his battle cry, and slowly the monster awoke. He came out from his lair and stood in the sunshine, and as the bright rays fell on him he changed from inky black to dazzling white.

"Who are you," he cried, "who value your life so little that you come here to lose it at my hand?"

Sternly Rustem spoke. "I am Rustem, the son of Zal, and I come to avenge the wrongs of the Shah of Persia."

The Demon started in surprise, but very quickly he recovered himself. He seized a huge rock from the mountain side, and hurled it at the daring intruder; but Rustem stepped lightly to one side and the stone passed harmlessly by him. Quick as thought he rushed at the Demon and wounded him in the leg; then the two closed, and there began a fight so fierce and grim that it seemed as if both must perish in the tremendous struggle. Backward and forward they went, while bones cracked and blood flowed, and each despaired of freeing himself from the deadly grasp of his opponent. But suddenly a rush of new and marvellous strength came to Rustem. With one great effort he dashed his foe to the ground. The monster's head struck the rock with such tremendous force that he lay there bleeding and lifeless.

Then Rustem, in joy and thankfulness, cut out the Demon's heart, and made his way back to where the blind Shah and his blind followers were waiting.

"He comes!" cried Kai Kaoos as he caught the sound of galloping hoofs, and in a few moments all of them heard Rustem's triumphant voice. Then a great shout went up, and they crowded round him as he came into their prison. With the blood from the Demon's heart he anointed each man's eyes, and as it touched them sight came back. The men looked round wonderingly upon the strange city in which they had dwelt so long.

"Go," cried the Shah, "ride through Mazinderan and take possession of it." Then he called to him special messengers of the bravest of his host. "Go you," he said, "and tell the King that the great White Demon is dead and summon him to submit to Kai Kaoos, Shah of Persia."



RUSTEM SEEKS THE WHITE DEMON
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THE DEATH OF SOHRAB

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Rustem

So the messengers went, but the King of Mazinderan heard them disdainfully and replied with scorn.

"I am a greater king than Kai Kaoos," he said, "and I reign over a wider dominion. My soldiers are braver and more numerous than his. A hundred elephants of war have I, and Kai Kaoos has not one. Why then should I submit to him? Let him come forth to meet me in battle if he dare."

When this message was told to Rustem he fell into a great fury.

"Send me now, O Shah, as your messenger," he demanded. So Kai Kaoos caused a writing to be made in which he threatened to hang the King on the walls of his own city if he refused to submit; and this writing he gave to Rustem.

When Rustem drew near to the palace of the King of Mazinderan a troop of warriors came out to meet him. They were huge men, for they came of a giant race, and they hoped to overawe Rustem by their size and strength. But Rustem quickly showed them that his strength was equal to theirs, for he plucked up a tree that grew by the road and wielded it as a spear. When one of the warriors offered a hand in greeting he took it calmly in his own; and when the warrior gripped it with all his strength, thinking to tear it from his arm, Rustem smilingly returned the grip with one so fierce that the sinews of the warrior cracked and he fell helpless from his horse.

Watching servants hastened to the King and told him what had happened. Angry and disappointed, the King called to Kalabar, hugest and strongest of his giant guard.

"Deal you with this daring Persian," he said.

And Kalabar answered, "From my grip there shall be no escape."

When Rustem entered the palace Kalabar met him and grasped his hand, but his strength was as that of a babe beside the strength of Rustem, and he went back to his master ruefully showing his crushed hand.

"Make peace with this fellow," he advised, "for none can conquer him."

But the proud King haughtily refused. "Bring the messenger before me," he commanded; and Rustem was brought in.

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When the King looked on the mighty limbs and noble face he cried out, "Surely you are Rustem, the famous champion of the Persians, who slew the White Demon." But Rustem answered evasively:

"I am Rustem's servant. Rustem is stronger than all your host. Your men and your demons, your elephants and your lions, will be as naught before him."

But the King would not be turned from his own way. "We will fight," he said, "were every man in your army a Rustem. Take this answer to Kai Kaoos: The King of Mazinderan will teach him humility on the battlefield."

So Rustem went back, and both sides made themselves ready for battle. For seven days the fight lasted, and though the Persians fought bravely, it seemed to Rustem that there was little chance of victory. On the eighth day he challenged the King of Mazinderan to single combat; but just as he was about to overthrow his opponent the King by his magic arts changed himself suddenly into a great mass of rock.

The whole army stared in amazement, but Rustem, who was prepared for such devices, went calmly to wash his wounds in a stream.

"Tear me that rock from its place!" cried Kai Kaoos; but though all his host tugged at it, they could not move it even a single inch. Then came Rustem, refreshed by the cool water, and laying hands on the rock he lifted it easily and bore it to the door of the Shah's tent, where he laid it down.

"Come forth," he cried, "in your own shape, or I will grind this stone to powder and scatter it to the winds."

Then the King was terribly afraid, and took his own form again and stood before Rustem, who brought him for judgment to Kai Kaoos; and he was at once sentenced and put to death.

So the city of Mazinderan was conquered, and the Persians were free to return to their own land. "To you be the thanks and the glory," said Kai Kaoos to Rustem, "for it is you who have brought us to safety."

But Rustem answered, "Not so; without the loyal help of Aulad I could have done nothing. Let him therefore be made

Rustem

King of Mazinderan, and let me go back to my own country and to my old father, Zal."

So they made Aulad King of Mazinderan, and the hosts of Kai Kaoos returned thankfully to Persia.

The years went on, and Rustem grew more and more famous for his great deeds, until his name was known, not only throughout his own land, but also in many far countries. Kai Kaoos was a headstrong and foolish Shah, and often his unwise deeds brought him and his country into great trouble, and then men looked to Rustem to deliver them. Not once did he fail them, and each year the nation loved and trusted and depended on him more and more.

When there was no fighting to be done Rustem loved to hunt, and often he journeyed far from his own city to wild lands where lived fierce beasts that were worthy prey. One day he had been hunting in a distant forest, and, being tired, he roasted a wild ass that he had killed, made a hearty meal, and lay down to sleep. While he slept came seven men stealing up, who laid hands on Rakush, and tried to lead him away. The noble beast fought desperately, but at last he was overpowered and dragged from the place.

All this time Rustem slept, and when he awoke and found that Rakush did not come at his call he was terribly distressed.

"Alas, my Rakush!" he cried, "where have you gone? Never would you have left your master of your own will, for faithful and loving have you ever been. This is the work of an enemy, and dearly shall you be avenged."

He looked carefully at the grass where the marks of hoofs were plainly to be seen. He followed the hoof-prints, and they led him toward a certain city which he had visited before, and to whose King and nobles he was well known. As he drew near those who watched at the gates saw him, and quickly the news went round that the famous Rustem was approaching, alone and on foot. The King came out with a band of his followers to greet him, but Rustem replied angrily to their courteous words.

"Where is my horse Rakush?" he demanded; "I have traced his hoof-marks to the gate of your city, so I know that he has

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been brought therein. Never would he have left me of his own will. Thieves must have dragged him from me while I slept."

"We know nothing of your horse," they assured him, "and we grieve much that he is lost. Deign to enter the city, and we will do all that can be done to find him for you and to punish the thieves."

Then Rustem came in, and was received with high honour. A great banquet was made for him, and after it was over he was



RUSTEM MEETS TAMINEH

led to a rose-scented couch, where he soon fell asleep. He was awakened by a slave girl carrying a lamp, and sitting up he saw behind her a maiden tall and graceful, and so lovely that it seemed to him he had never seen one so fair.

"Who are you?" he cried in astonishment; and the maiden answered:

"I am Tamineh, daughter of the King. Never before has any man, save my father, looked upon my face. But I have heard of you, my lord, and of your brave deeds, and I longed by some means to bring you to this city. So when I heard that

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you were near I sent out my servants, who took Rakush and brought him into the city. For I said to myself, 'Where Rakush goes, Rustem will surely follow.' And now if you can love me, ask me in marriage of my father, and Rakush shall be given back to you."

Then Rustem rose and took the maiden's hand in gladness, for a great love for her had come suddenly into his heart, and he rejoiced to hear her words. The King her father gladly gave her to Rustem, and the marriage was celebrated without delay.

For a few days Rustem stayed with his bride, and the time passed swiftly in feasting and merriment. Then one morning he heard the voice of Rakush neighing outside the city gates, and he knew that this was a sign to him that he must return to his own country, where men had need of him. Very sorrowfully he parted from his fair wife; and, taking an amulet made of an onyx stone from his arm, he gave it to her, saying:

"If while I am absent from you Heaven should send you a little daughter bind this onyx in her hair; but if a son, place it upon his arm."

Then he rode away, and Tamineh wept bitterly, for she feared she would never see him again. When he reached his own country he told no one of his marriage, and, war breaking out shortly afterward, all his mind and energies were devoted to that, and he thought little of Tamineh and of all that had taken place in her father's city.

But Tamineh thought always of her lord and longed to see him, but by and by a child was born to her who brought her comfort. He was a lovely, laughing boy, who from the hour of his birth smiled and crowed so happily that his mother called him Sohrab, which means 'the child of smiles.' Like his father, when he was only a month old he was as big and strong as most babies are at the end of a year, and he grew so quickly in strength and stature that all who saw him said: "Here will be a mighty warrior when the years shall have brought him to manhood."

Tamineh was very proud of her beautiful son, and she grieved that his father could not see and rejoice in him. But as she watched the baby grow and thrive she thought, "If Rustem

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should know he has a son that promises so splendidly he will take him from me while yet he is a child to train him in the arts of war." So strong grew this fear that when she sent messengers to her husband she bade them say that a daughter had been born to her. The father heard the news with a sigh of disappointment, for he had hoped for a son whom he could train to be a warrior like himself. He sent back a loving message to Tamineh, "Train up our little daughter tenderly, and be both mother and father to her, for the Shah has need of me on the battlefield, and I cannot yet come to you."

So Sohrab grew up without seeing his father, and until he was ten years old he thought little of whose son he was, being taken up with the manly exercises and sports in which his mother caused him to be trained. But one day he came to Tamineh, and said :

"See, I am taller and stronger than any of my playmates, and yet when they ask me of my race and of my father's name I can tell them nothing. Tell me, I pray you, who is my father."

Then Tamineh answered proudly, "My son, your father's name is Rustem, and he is the greatest hero the world has ever seen." The boy's face kindled, and brighter than ever grew his smiles.

"Tell me of him, O mother. Tell me of my famous father whose name I have heard men speak with praise and wonder."

So Tamineh told him of his father's marvellous deeds, and the boy never tired of listening. Day by day he came, leaving his comrades and his games, eager only to hear more of this glorious father whom he had never seen ; until at last, when he had grown out of childhood, and had become a tall and handsome youth, it seemed to him that he could stay beside his mother no longer.

"Mother," he cried, "tell me where my father is, that I may go and fight by his side."

"Would you leave me all alone?" asked Tamineh, sadly. "See, I have no one but you, for years have passed since my husband left me, and he comes not again. Stay with me, my son, or my heart will break."

Rustem

But Sohrab's heart was on fire with longing to meet his hero father, and he soothed his mother with loving words, promising that soon he would return, and perchance bring Rustem with him. Tamineh saw that it was of no use to try to keep him, so with tears she bade him depart, binding the onyx on his arm.

"Let none know that you are the son of Rustem," she said, "or his enemies will seek you out and you will perish."

Sohrab lifted his head proudly. "Never when I have found my father will I hide my name," he said; "until then I will be nameless. I will find him and help him to tread his enemies under his feet. But first I will turn this Kai Kaoos, the foolish and feeble Shah, from his throne and put my father in his place."

Eagerly he made his preparations. He chose a steed from the royal stables, testing it as his father had done before him, and his choice fell upon a colt who was a foal of Rakush. On this steed Sohrab, with a band of followers, rode forth with a high heart to his great adventure.

Now when Afrasiab, King of the Tartars, who was an enemy of Rustem's, heard that Sohrab was marching against Persia he determined to make an alliance with him; so he sent messengers, offering to help him against Kai Kaoos, and Sohrab gladly accepted the offer. With a great force he marched toward Persia, took the White Fort which guarded its borders, and prepared for battle.

At the court of Kai Kaoos there was great alarm and commotion when news was brought in that an army, led by a young chieftain of marvellous courage, was encamped on the borders of Persia. At once Kai Kaoos sent for Rustem, who, now that he was growing old, liked to retire sometimes to his distant home for rest after the toils of battle.

"Go swiftly," commanded the Shah, "stay not for food nor rest, and bring back Rustem to our aid."

When Rustem heard of the wonderful young chieftain who was threatening Persia he grew thoughtful. "He comes from the country where dwells Tamineh, my wife," he mused, "and such

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might my son have been had it pleased Allah to give me a son. But I have only a daughter, who is still a child."

"Stay with me to-night," he said to the messenger, and though the man repeated the orders of Kai Kaoos, Rustem insisted. Next day, when the messenger again entreated him to depart, he again refused. He made a great feast, which lasted for seven days, and on the eighth he at last mounted Rakush and rode at the head of his warriors to the city of the Shah.

As they drew near they saw a band of chieftains anxiously looking out for them, and without delay Rustem was brought into the presence of the Shah. Kai Kaoos looked upon him in silence for a few moments, and then his rage broke forth.

"Does Rustem think himself greater than his King that he scorns my behests and tarries at his own will? Take him, I command you, with yonder rascally messenger, and let them both die the death of traitors."

Dismay seized the hearts of all who heard the words, and they stood in horrified silence. Then one of the nobles ventured to say, "Would you slay Rustem, the shield of Persia?" But the headstrong Shah was too furious to listen. "Take him!" he cried, and at last one of his officers stepped forward and laid a hand on Rustem's arm. Rustem dashed it away, and standing upright and defiant he spoke to the Shah.

"O weak and foolish man! this is the basest of your many follies. Think you that Rustem fears so poor a creature as Kai Kaoos? It is I who have held you on your throne, and saved you from your enemies, and you dare to threaten me with death! I will bear with you no longer. I will leave this land, and when this stranger who comes against you has ground you under his heel Rustem will neither know nor care."

Proudly he strode from the court, and springing upon Rakush rode swiftly away.

Utter dismay fell on those he left behind. Gloomily the chieftains recalled how time after time Rustem had saved the country from perils from which no escape had seemed possible; and bitterly they blamed the foolish Shah who had sent from him his strongest defender. At last one who was high in favour

Rustem

with the Shah ventured to remonstrate with him, reminding him of the great deeds Rustem had done, and the gratitude the country owed him. Those who stood by expected to hear the Shah order the man to instant death ; but the brief strength that his rage had given him was gone, and he was again the poor-spirited and foolish Shah who feared to stand alone.

"It is true," he said sorrowfully. "Go, seek Rustem and bring him back, and I will humble myself before him."

Instantly swift horses were saddled, and the noblest among the Persians rode at full speed to bring back the man who was the only hope of their country in its time of need. It was some days before they overtook him, and then he angrily refused to return.

"I am weary of the follies of this wretched Shah. Why should I go to him again to be angered by his vanity and his weakness?"

All the prayers of the nobles, his old friends, were of no avail, until one of them said, "Bethink you, my lord, that if you now depart men will say you fled before the face of Sohrab, and the hearts of all the people will fail, for they will say, 'If Rustem fears him what use for us to fight?' So will the country be destroyed, and the tale will be told how Rustem dared not meet a beardless boy."

These words moved Rustem, and he slackened his speed, and rode slowly and thoughtfully, while the messengers waited in trembling suspense. Then he turned, and set his horse's head toward Persia.

"I will come with you," he said ; "none shall say that Rustem fears mortal man, or that, through him, the men of Persia became cowards."

Kai Kaoos received him with such show of humility that his generous heart was touched. "The whole world is yours, and you had a right to demand haste in your servants," he said ; "I am your loyal soldier till I die."

The army was gathered together under this tried and trusted leader, and such a great host was assembled that when Sohrab's followers saw it advancing they cried out in dismay, "We are lost !" But Sohrab laughed, for this was the day he had longed for, and he feasted and rejoiced as on a high festival.

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Next morning he went up to the lofty battlements of the White Fort, and sent for its warden, Hujir, whom he had taken prisoner.

"Answer truthfully the questions that I shall ask you," he said, "and I will set you free; but deceive me, and you shall spend the rest of your life in captivity."

"I will speak the truth unto my lord," answered Hujir.

"Tell me," said Sohrab, "whose is yonder tent hung with leopard skins and surrounded by elephants of war. From it floats a violet flag, and inside I see a jewelled throne."

"That," said Hujir, "is the tent of Kai Kaoos."

"And whose is that draped in black, with an elephant brodered on the floating banner?"

"That is the tent of Tus, the warrior."

"And to whom belongs the crimson pavilion, over which waves a gold flag with the image of a lion?"

"That is the tent of Gudarz the brave, and of his eighty sons, who stand there all but one, and that unhappy one am I," answered Hujir.

"Whose is the green tent yonder in which sits a man of noble form? Over it waves a standard bearing a lion and a dragon."

This was the tent of Rustem, and that Hujir knew full well; but he would not tell Sohrab this lest by guile he might take the Persian leader unawares. So he answered:

"That is the tent of a chieftain come from China to help Kai Kaoos, but I do not know his name."

"But the man who stands in the doorway," asked Sohrab, "is not that Rustem?"

"I know not the name of that chieftain," Hujir replied.

Sohrab's face clouded with disappointment. His mother had told him to look for a banner bearing on it a dragon and a lion, and for a man mightier in stature than any of the other warriors of Kai Kaoos; and at once when he had seen this chieftain his heart had seemed to tell him that here was his father.

"Where then is Rustem's tent?" he asked.

"Rustem is not here, O my lord," answered Hujir, "nor is there one here like unto him; for he is terrible to look on, and

Rustem

when the battle fury seizes him neither man nor elephant nor leopard can stand against him."

"What care I for Rustem and the idle tales men tell of his marvellous doings," cried Sohrab, in pretended anger, for he did not wish any to guess yet that Rustem was his father and that all his desire was to find and embrace him. "I ask only that I may challenge him to battle, and try my strength against his."

Then Hujir looked at the young man and saw how tall he was, and how mighty were his limbs and keen his eye, and he said to himself, "This boy is wondrous in strength even as our great Rustem, and it might happen that did the two meet our champion would be overcome." So he answered, hoping to put fear in Sohrab's heart, "Wait until the battle joins, and then there will be little need to find Rustem, for he will soon find you, and then your life will pay for the bold words you have spoken."

Angrily Sohrab looked at him, and was minded to slay him with his sword; but, thinking that the man had told him true words, according to his belief, he remembered his promise and turned, disappointed, away.

Soon the two armies were arrayed, and stood facing each other along the banks of the Oxus. Then Sohrab, fully armed, came forward and rode right into the Persian lines.

"Come forth, Kai Kaoos!" he shouted in a voice of thunder. "I challenge you to single combat. Come and try your might against mine."

There was no answer, and Sohrab cried again tauntingly, "Is it thus that kings skulk in their tents when they are called upon to fight? Come out, O Kai Kaoos!"

But still none came, for the Shah and all his nobles were overwhelmed by the boldness of the young chieftain. Hastily they sent for Rustem. But Rustem had made up his mind he would not fight that day.

"Let any other do battle to-day," he said, "to-morrow I will come."

None could be found to take up Sohrab's challenge, and at last the Shah sent a messenger saying that on the next morning

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the champion of the Shah would come forward to meet Sohrab in single combat.

Sohrab waited anxiously, for he hoped that Rustem, the greatest of all the Persians, would be sent to do battle with him, and by this means he would meet his father, and could reveal himself to him. But Rustem, sitting in his tent, thought shame upon himself to fight against a young and untried boy ; and only because his comrades entreated him, saying that none other could save Persia, did he consent to do so.

" Yet I will not fight under my own name," he said, " but I will come as a stranger knight in plain armour, and with no device upon my shield."

Between the camps of the two armies lay a little sandy plain. Here came Rustem the next morning, ready for combat. A blood-red plume waved from his helmet, and his dark face, which was worn and ageing, looked out with sad interest at the tall, goodly young man who came to meet him. Just such an one, it seemed to Rustem, had he himself been in his splendid youth, and he shrank from dealing with this opponent as he had dealt with all those whom before he had met in battle. He beckoned Sohrab to come near him, and spoke gently.

" You are young," he said, " and life is strong within you, and many days lie before you, filled with all good and pleasant things. I am a warrior, old and tried. Many combats have I fought, and never have I been overcome. Bethink you now, take back your challenge, and come with me to my own country ; live with me as my son, fighting my battles."

The deep voice thrilled through Sohrab, and as he looked at the noble form he thought with a great rush of joy, " This is my father."

" You are Rustem," he cried ; " tell me, is it not true that you are the great Rustem ? "

Then Rustem frowned, for he thought, " The boy wishes to boast that he challenged Rustem, and that Rustem, recognizing him as equal in strength, made a pact with him so that they parted in friendship. "

Rustem

"Why do you prate of Rustem?" he asked roughly. "Did you not challenge one of Persia's host, and have I not come in answer to your challenge? If Rustem indeed came and spoke with you your eyes would fall before his, and you would flee. Now yield, else shall you fall by my hand, and your bones lie bleaching on Oxus banks."

Then Sohrab's pride rose hotly. "Threaten me not. I am no girl to turn pale when men speak to me of death. Come now, your strength against mine."

Then began a stern and dreadful combat. Fiercely they fought, until their swords were hacked and useless. Then Rustem took his great club, and struck with all his mighty strength. But Sohrab lightly stepped aside so that the blow fell upon the earth; then he rushed upon his opponent and the two wrestled together until their armour was crushed, and blood and sweat poured from them to the earth; and they were forced to stand apart for a moment's breathing space.

"Now let us take our bows and arrows," cried Sohrab gaily; but in this warfare each was as skilled as the other and neither could gain any advantage. Then they wrestled again, and then struck with maces and with clubs, but still neither could get the better of the other; and at last they parted, agreeing to continue the fight next morning.

All through that night Sohrab's heart was heavy and anxious, for a voice within him told him that this opponent, whose look and tone moved him so strongly, was indeed his father. When once more they faced each other on the plain he longed to fall on his knees in reverence rather than renew the fight.

But Rustem's mood was stern. His pride was wounded that he had not overthrown this untried boy, and he was eager to retrieve his honour. At the first onset he struck such a mighty blow with his club, that when Sohrab avoided it as he had done before, by stepping aside, it brought Rustem himself to the ground.

Now he was at Sohrab's mercy, but smilingly the boy bade him rise.

"Be not wroth," he said gently; "you say you are not Rustem,

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yet, whoever you are, you have power to touch my soul and take all anger from me. Come, now, let us plant our spears in the earth and sit down together, pledging one another in red wine, and you shall tell me of Rustem and of his famous deeds."

But Rustem, furious at his fall, deemed Sohrab's words mockery.

"Girl!" he cried in fury, "you who are nimble on your feet as a dancer, and so can escape the blows of warriors who scorn such skipping tricks. Come now, let us fight and quit vain words."

So they fought again, wrestling and straining together like lions, and at last Sohrab managed to throw Rustem to the ground; and he would have killed him with his dagger had not Rustem said, "Do you not know that it is only when a champion has fallen a second time that his life is forfeit?"

Then Sohrab, glad that he might without dishonour spare his enemy, sheathed his dagger, and both went in silence to their tents.

Morning came once more, and again the two champions met on the sandy plain. Without greeting or parley they struck; and as the grim combat began, all around them fell a gloom and a darkness, while over the rest of the plain the sun still shone brightly. Then came thunder and lightning, and Rakush, who through all the combat had stood near his master, gave a dreadful cry.

Still the strife continued, and neither could gain an advantage; until Rustem, forgetting all else in the fury of battle, shouted as he raised his spear for one tremendous effort, "Rustem!" At that word Sohrab started, and his arms dropped to his side, so that his shield fell clattering to the ground; he stared at his adversary bewildered and aghast. Swiftly Rustem's spear pierced his unguarded side, and he fell on the sand, wounded unto death.

Then Rustem spoke bitterly. "See now what has come of your proud challenge! You thought the great Rustem himself would come and do battle with you, and lo, you are slain by the hand of an unknown man."

But the boy gasped out fiercely, "Rustem it was, not you, who slew me, for at that name my hand lost its power. And Rustem will surely avenge the death of his son."

Rustem

"What is this talk of fathers and revenge?" said his foe mockingly. "The mighty Rustem never had a son."

"Aye, but he had," answered Sohrab, "and that son am I. And when the news of my death reaches him he will grieve, and rise to take revenge, but my mother Tamineh will weep and her heart will break when she knows that her Sohrab will return to her no more."

The words startled Rustem, and there rose up in his mind a picture of that pleasant city where he had wooed Tamineh, his beautiful princess, and had spent glad summer days with her in her father's palace. Again he spoke:

"Rustem has but one child, a daughter," he said, "and she is with her mother Tamineh in a far city."

Then Sohrab held up his feeble hand and pointed to the onyx bound upon his wrist.

"My mother has no daughter," he said, "and by this onyx which Rustem gave her and bade her bind on her babe's arm you may know that I am his son."

Cold with a great terror Rustem looked and knew the onyx by the device carved upon it. Then the awful truth came to him, and he cried out in a voice of agony, "My son! . . . Boy! I am your father, and I have killed you!"

But to Sohrab came a great joy that at last he had found his famous father and been owned by him. He looked at the anguished face that bent over him with adoring love, and when Rustem would have taken his sword and slain himself Sohrab's feeble hand upon his arm stayed him.

"Come," said the youth, "but little time remains to me, my father, and I long to hear your voice speaking gently to me and calling me your son. Sit down beside me and hold my head between your hands, and I shall deem my life well lost since, losing it, I gain my father's love."

Then Rustem sat down and clasped his son to his heart, and the hosts on either side watched in breathless awe. Rakush came and stood by the stricken father, with bowed head, the tears dropping from his soft, dark eyes, and Sohrab looked with delight on the horse whose name he knew so well.

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"Grieve not so bitterly, my father," said the boy, "all men must die, and I die happy, knowing that I have found you, and that you have received and loved me. And now I pray you let these hosts depart without battle and bear my body to your own home, where dwells with you my grandfather, the wise Zal, and bury me there. Then men shall come to my grave and say, 'Here lies Sohrab, the son of great Rustem, who slew him, not knowing who he was.'"

But the father would not be comforted and his anguish was terrible to see. "Would that I might die for you, my son! How can I live without you?"

Soon the end came, and Sohrab lay dead upon the sand, his lips still smiling as they had smiled in life; and Rustem covered his face with his horseman's cloak and sat motionless all through the night, mourning for his son.

Next day the body of Sohrab was borne toward his father's home, and there a tomb was raised above it, and all men pitied the great chieftain on whom had fallen such a terrible sorrow.

From the day of his son's death Rustem was changed into an old and sorrowful man. His joy in battle left him, and he spent most of his time in his distant home, except when trouble came and the Shah sent in haste to the old champion to come and deliver his country. Not once did Rustem fail him; and when he was on the battlefield his arm was as strong, his shout as lusty, and his prowess as great as in the days of his youth. But when the danger was over he was glad to return to his home and to his old father, and to his sad thoughts of his son and the life they two might have led together had fate been kinder.

So the years passed by, and still Rustem remained the great champion of Persia, the foremost man in the land. Many envied him his high position, and some sought eagerly for a means to destroy him. Foremost among these was Shughad, one of the younger sons of Zal, who had married the daughter of the King of Kabul. This King had been overcome by Rustem and for many years had paid him tribute, so that he was willing to help Shughad in his evil designs. Together they plotted to slay the great chieftain.

Rustem

"You shall pretend to quarrel with me," said Shughad, "and I will go to my brother and tell him of your insults ; and I know he will come quickly to avenge me. Meanwhile you must cause your servants to dig deep pits and to place within them swords and spears with their points turned upward, and these pits you must cover over carefully with boughs and earth. Then when Rustem comes you must receive him with humility, and make your peace with him. You must invite him to go with you on a hunting expedition, and he must take the road in which lie the pits you have prepared. Thus he will be destroyed."

All this was done as it was planned. Rustem, coming hot with generous anger to avenge his unworthy brother, was met by the King barefoot and with all the signs of sorrow and repentance. It was easy to persuade the noble, unsuspecting Rustem of his sincerity, and willingly the old champion rode back to the palace where he was feasted, with a show of honour.

On the morrow a great hunt was prepared, and Rustem, who loved the chase, rode gladly forth. But as they neared the place where the pits had been made, Rakush smelt the new-turned earth, and refused to go farther. It was only when Rustem dug his spurs into his side and shouted to him in a voice of thunder that the poor horse at last went forward.

A moment later he fell into the first of the treacherous pits, and the cruel knives cut and tore his body. Yet with a great effort he struggled breathlessly out, only to fall into the next pit and once more suffer terrible wounds. Again and yet again the brave horse, though at the point of death, dragged himself and his master out of the trap set for them ; but it was in vain. In the seventh pit his strength failed him, and he could struggle no longer. He lay down, helpless and bleeding, and his master, who also was terribly wounded, saw that the end was near. He called in a weak voice to his brother Shughad.

"Why have you done this thing ?" he said. "You, that are my own father's son ?"

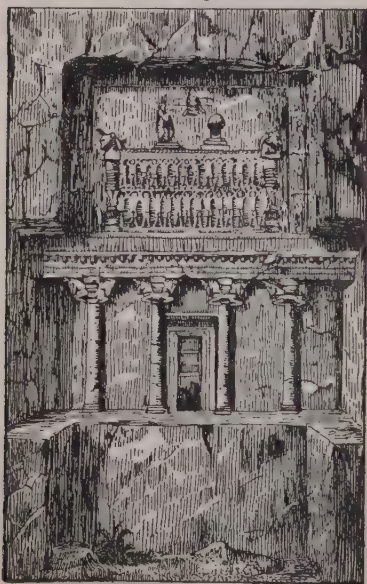
Then Shughad cried, "Much blood have you shed, and now retribution has come upon you. Your end has come."

There was wicked triumph in his voice, and no trace of pity ;

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but the King of Kabul, when he saw the mighty champion brought into such piteous case, called aloud to his physicians to bring healing balms and try if even now his life might be saved. But Rustem scorned their help.

"I will die unconquerable as I have lived," he said, "and a terrible vengeance will be exacted for my death. Give but my bow into my hands that the wolves and vultures may fear to devour my body."



RUSTEM'S TOMB

Then Shughad with an evil smile gave him his bow and arrow, and Rustem took them so eagerly that his craven brother fled in terror and hid behind a tree. Rustem, with a mighty effort, gathered up his failing strength. He drew his bow and shot an arrow with such force that it pierced the tree and pierced the heart of the traitor who stood behind it.

Then Rustem looked up to heaven and cried, "I thank Allah that He has given me strength to avenge my death upon my murderer."

There was a great silence ; and when at last the King of Kabul

ventured near the pit to look once more on the great hero, Rustem was dead.

His dying words were fulfilled. The Shah of Persia marched at once, with a great army, to Kabul and laid it waste. He found Rustem's body, and brought it to his own country, and buried it with great honour in a tomb carved out of the great rock ; and the aged Zal mourned over him as he himself had mourned over his own son, crying, "Would that I had died for thee, my son, my son !"

CHAPTER VII

ROLAND

THE *Chanson de Roland*, the old French epic poem from which the story of this hero is mainly drawn, is founded upon an incident that occurred on August 15, 778, in the little valley of Roncesvalles among the Pyrenees. Charlemagne was returning from his expedition against the infidels of Spain, and the main part of his army had passed safely through the narrow defile. But as the rearguard reached the entrance some thousands of the Basques who lived among the mountains fell upon them, and, greatly outnumbering them, killed them after a fierce fight, to the very last Frenchman. Their leader, Roland, prefect of the Marches of Brittany, died with his men.

On this foundation the story was gradually built up. Ideas and customs belonging to a later time were worked into it, notably the customs and practices of chivalry. Roland is presented, not as a warrior of the early Franks, but as a polished and accomplished knight, such as was to be found among the Normans two or three centuries later.

When William the Conqueror invaded England his favourite minstrel, Taillefer, rode out from the Norman ranks and dashed toward the English, whirling his sword and chanting this Song of Roland, for by that time Roland had become the ideal hero of the Norman race whom every true knight desired to imitate; and such he remained through many generations.

THE great Emperor Charlemagne sat in the banqueting hall of the fair palace he had built for himself in a forest glade at Aix. With him at the board were the noblest knights and the fairest ladies in France, splendid in bright-hued robes and flashing jewels. Clear and high rose the minstrel's song, telling

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the great deeds of Charlemagne, and how he had borne the sword against the infidel, and when the song was finished the joyous voices of knights and ladies were heard, in courtly words and gay laughter.

Suddenly a boy was seen approaching the royal board. He was a handsome little fellow and he held himself proudly, though his face was flushed and his breath came quickly as if some sense



ROLAND BEARING AWAY THE DISH

of danger mingled with his daring. He came straight up to the table and laid his hands on the dish that stood nearest to him ; then, without a word or a look to any in the hall, he bore away his prize, and, darting to the door, he disappeared.

The gay voices had ceased as he approached, and in sheer amazement the company had watched the daring little thief. But as he disappeared the silence was broken by loud and astonished exclamations, and knights and servants started up to pursue and bring him back. But Charlemagne raised his hand.

Roland

"Nay, let the boy go," he said, a smile upon his kingly face; "something he deserves for the courage with which he bearded this assembly. Leave him to sup in peace."

So the feast went on, and again the talk and laughter rose. Then came a sudden hush, followed by a chorus of exclamations, for here was the boy again. He seemed to have gained courage from the success of his first raid, for he came boldly up to where the Emperor himself sat, and took up the golden cup, filled with rich wine, from which he was about to drink. But he was not allowed to carry off his booty.

"Hold!" cried Charlemagne, and the servant who stood near by laid a heavy hand on the boy's shoulder. "What would you with my cup of wine?"

The boy looked at the Emperor unabashed, and answered:

"'Tis for my mother, a lady of high degree, who lives near by."

There were smiles on the faces of some of the lords and ladies at this reply, for the boy's clothes, though they were of fine cloth, and cut after the manner of a well-born page's attire, were old and worn and soiled; and that a lady of high degree should send her son to steal her supper from the Emperor's table seemed a thing too strange for belief.

"And where is your mother's cupbearer gone, that I must needs serve her from my table?" asked the Emperor in jesting tones; but the boy answered in proud seriousness:

"I am my mother's cupbearer," he said, "and I serve her on bended knee, and do her all other service that a page owes to his lady."

"'Tis good," said the Emperor, delighted at the boy's spirit. "I trow she is well served. Doubtless there are many gallant knights in your mother's train to teach you your duties."

"I am my mother's gallant knight," said the boy, still more proudly. "She has no other."

"'Tis a marvellous household, truly," said the Emperor in grave mockery, "and a noble following. Much do I desire to see the lady of high degree whom you serve. Wilt take me to her, boy?"

The boy's face flushed, but he still held his head high. "I

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will take you, O Emperor," he said, "if you desire, so that you show honour to my mother, as befits her rank."

"That will I," said the Emperor. "Let us go. The way surely is but short, since you yourself went and returned in so brief a space."

So he called his servants and they made him ready, and while his Court looked on with smothered laughter he went out with the boy and two attendants to pay his strange visit.

The boy stopped outside a small, poor house, and with a courteous gesture begged the Emperor to wait.

"I must first prepare my mother," he said, and he entered.

After a moment the Emperor heard a stifled cry, and the sound of hurried words, and he started, for the voice seemed familiar to him. Then the boy came out and led him in.

Now it was the Emperor's turn to cry out, for before him stood his own sister, Bertha—pale and worn with grief, and wearing the garb of a widow, but as beautiful as when he had parted from her in anger, and she had left his Court to marry, against his will, the brave young knight, Milon, who had seemed to the Emperor unworthy to wed with one of the royal race.

Now, as he saw her in poverty and sorrow, Charlemagne's anger gave way. Gently he spoke, calling her sister and bidding her tell him what had brought her to so sad a pass. And she, finding him in brotherly mood, let go all her pride, and with tears told him her sad story. Her husband, while attempting to ford a stream, had been carried away and drowned, and had left her with her boy Roland, helpless and almost penniless. The boy, young as he was, had been her great help, serving her, indeed, as cupbearer, page, and gallant knight.

Grief and remorse bowed Charlemagne's head, and he vowed that never again should his sister or her son suffer poverty or trouble that it was in his power to keep from them. He brought Bertha and Roland at once, with all honour, to his Court, and from that day forward he made them his special care. Roland was trained in all knightly exercises, and showed himself so brave and loyal, so ready and courteous and eager to serve, that his uncle's pride in him grew greater day by day.



THE LONG COMBAT IS ENDED
J. C. Dollman

Roland

The years passed and the boy became a youth, eager to prove his skill and courage by high deeds and great adventures ; and soon the chance came. Charlemagne had quarrelled with the Duke of Genoa, and it was agreed that each should send a champion to uphold his cause. Charlemagne chose Roland, and the Duke sent to meet him a brave young knight named Oliver.

The fight took place on an island in the river Rhone. Thither came the champions, and never were opponents, in strength and skill and courage, so equally matched. Roland's sword Durandal and Oliver's sword Hauteclere were each of unsurpassed temper and sharpness, and for joy and eagerness in battle, none could have been so keen as Oliver, save Roland.

For a whole day the fight went on with scant breathing spaces and with no slackening of fury on either side. Yet neither Roland nor Oliver could claim a victory, for so equally were they matched that neither could gain an advantage over the other. Then, when dusk was falling, a white figure came and stood between them and thrust back their swords. Amazed they stood, their arms uplifted, until the shining presence said :

" Cease now, for it is enough. Bravely have you striven, yet should you strive so for many days, neither of you would prevail ; for none can match Oliver save Roland, nor any stand before Roland save Oliver. It is fitting then that you should be friends. Take you each the other by the hand, and swear to live in friendship while your lives shall last."

So the two threw down their swords and embraced each other, swearing a solemn oath as the angel had bidden them do. Then they turned, hoping to receive his blessing ; but the shining presence was gone.

From that day forward Roland and Oliver were true and faithful comrades, and so strong a love grew up between them that it seemed as if nothing but death could separate one from the other. They fought side by side, sharing dangers and dividing triumphs ; no joy or grief came to one but the other had his part.

It happened when these two had grown to manhood that a wonderful dream came one night to Charlemagne. As he lay

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upon his couch he became suddenly wide awake, and looking out from his chamber he saw the stars stretched in a string right across the heavens, and he noticed that one end of the line lay by the Frisian sea, and the other stretched away through Germany and France to Galicia, where lay the body of St James. He thought long upon this vision, wondering what it might mean, and the next night it came again. This time as the Emperor



ST JAMES APPEARS TO CHARLEMAGNE

looked intently upon the glittering line, a radiant figure appeared before him, and said :

“ What dost thou, my son ? ”

“ Who art thou, I pray thee ? ” asked the startled Emperor, and the vision replied :

“ I am James, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, who was sent to preach the Gospel, and perished by the sword. Now behold my body lies among the heathen, where it is scorned and shamefully treated. I marvel indeed that being so great a champion of the Christian faith

Roland

thou hast not ere now wrested my land from the grip of the Saracens. Yet do so, as God desires. Follow the line which the stars show thee, and get thee into Spain and deliver my country. Thus shalt thou have yet more glory and overcome more foes. Visit also that place where my body lies and raise there a church to my name."

Three times did this vision appear to Charlemagne, and each time St James spoke the same words ; so that at last the Emperor felt he dared not neglect the command thus given him. He called together his faithful knights and nobles, and gathered a great army. Twelve of his bravest knights he made peers, or paladins, and among these were Roland and Oliver. Oliver had by this time married a princess, daughter of the King of Jerusalem, and Roland had lately become betrothed to Oliver's beautiful sister, Aude.

With his great army Charlemagne marched into Spain, and for seven years he fought against the infidels until he had conquered all the high land down to the sea, except Saragossa, which still held out against him.

Marsile, the heathen King of Saragossa, sat in an arbour on a throne of blue marble, holding a council. "Great peril are we in," he said to the nobles who sat around him. "Charlemagne has come hither to destroy us. I have no force that can prevail against his vast army. Counsel me, as wise men, and guard me from death and shame."

For a time no one spoke. Then one of the nobles, Blanchandrin, said, "I counsel that you send to this haughty Emperor offering him service and friendship. Let messengers bear him rich presents—bears and lions and dogs and camels, four hundred mules loaded with gold and silver, and of money enough for him to pay all his troops in full. Beg him to return to France, and promise that you will come thither to him on the feast of St Michael, and will accept Christianity and become his vassal. If he asks for hostages give him ten or twenty of your young knights. I will send my son, though it be to death, for better is it that we should lose our sons than that ruin should come upon the country."

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Then all the assembly answered, "It is well said."

"Then," went on Blanchandrin, "he will depart into France, and the day of St Michael will come, but you will not appear. Then will the Emperor cut off the heads of our hostages, but we shall be saved, for it is not likely he will bring back his army."

Again the assembly answered, "It is well said."

So Marsile called ten barons to be his messengers and sent them to Charlemagne, promising them rich rewards if they made a treaty which should be in his favour. They went, mounted on white mules, whose bridles were of gold and whose saddles were set with silver, and with them went the gifts that Blanchandrin had advised the King to send.

When they drew near to Cordres, they saw the Emperor sitting in a great arbour. Round him were gathered his knights, full fifteen thousand. Some of them, old, grey-bearded men, sat upon white carpets and played chess or backgammon, but the younger ones fenced with each other and practised feats of arms.

Under a pine-tree was placed a seat made of pure gold, and upon this sat Charlemagne; but his noble bearing, his white beard and haughty face, would have shown him to be the Emperor had he mingled with the throng of his knights. The messengers from Marsile descended from their mules and came and bowed before him.

Blanchandrin, who was spokesman, gave his message, and for a time Charlemagne sat silent, pondering. Then he bade his people erect a tent in which the messengers might be lodged, saying he would give his answer on the morrow.

Next morning he summoned his council, and among others came Roland and Oliver, the good Archbishop Turpin, and Ganelon, who had married Bertha, and was therefore Roland's stepfather. To them the Emperor repeated Marsile's message, and asked what they would counsel him to do. Roland, who stood highest in the Emperor's regard, spoke first.

"Make no treaty with Marsile," he said, "for he is a traitor. Once before his messengers came to you, asking for peace, and you sent him two ambassadors whom he treacherously slew.

Roland

Lead now your host against Saragossa and lay siege to it until it surrenders, and avenge your people who have fallen by this felon's hand."

The Emperor, with bent head, tugged at his white beard, but answered nothing, bad or good. Then Ganelon spoke:

"Heed not foolish advice, O Charlemagne, no matter by whom it be given. He who counsels you to reject King Marsile's offer of submission puts pride before wisdom and has no care for men's lives. Leave him to his foolishness."

Then rose up Duke Naimes—no better vassal was there in all the Court.

"Ganelon has spoken wisely," he said; "Marsile is at your mercy, and it were sin to press him further, since he sues for peace. This great war should have an end."

"The Duke has spoken wisely," cried all the Franks.

"Who then," said the Emperor, "shall we send to bear this message to King Marsile?"

"By your leave," said Naimes, "I will go. Give me the glove and staff."

"Nay," replied the Emperor, "you are a man of good counsel and I have need of you here. Stay you in your place."

"I will go," cried Roland; but Oliver replied, chiding him:

"Not so; you are of a hot and fierce temper and would embroil yourself at King Marsile's Court. I myself will go."

"Silence!" cried the Emperor, "neither of you shall go. I will not choose my messenger from among my twelve paladins. Let that be well understood."

"Then," said Archbishop Turpin, "let me go, sire. Give peace to your brave land of France and let me bear your message to Marsile."

"Neither shall you go," answered Charlemagne, and he turned toward his assembled council. "Knights of France, choose me one among my barons who shall go on this embassy."

"Let it be Ganelon, my stepfather," cried Roland, and all the Franks cried out in assent.

"Yes," they shouted, "if you pass him by you will send none so wise."

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"Stand forward, then, Ganelon," said the Emperor, "and receive the glove and staff."

Ganelon stood forward, hate and rage in his face. "Sire," he said, "it is Roland who has done this. Henceforth I shall hate him and Oliver his comrade and all the Twelve Peers. I hate and defy them all."

"Stay," commanded the Emperor, "your wrath goes beyond due bounds. If I command you you must needs go. Take now the glove and staff."

"Well know I that I must go," replied Ganelon, "but for him who goes there will be no return. Never more shall I see my wife, your sister, nor my little son."

Then he let slip from him his great cloak of sables, and stood forth in his tunic of silk. His eyes flashed fire, and he spoke angrily to Roland:

"If God grant me to return again," he said, "I will bring woe upon you so great that it shall endure all the days of your life."

"You speak but pride and folly," answered Roland, "and all men know I care not for threats. But if the Emperor will, I am ready to go in your stead, as before I offered to do."

"Nay," replied Ganelon, "the Emperor has commanded me, and I go. But while I am there I will do somewhat to ease me of my great wrath."

At this Roland could not help laughing, and Ganelon, in fury, cried again, "You have brought this upon me, and I hate you." Then he turned to the Emperor and said, "Sire, I am ready."

"Go then," said the Emperor, "and say to Marsile that he must become my vassal and must be baptized. I will give him in fief the half of Spain, and the other half I will give to Roland. If he refuses these terms I will besiege Saragossa, and he shall be brought to Aix and shall die a cruel death. Take this letter and place it in his right hand."

The Emperor held out his gauntlet, with the letter, but Ganelon hesitated in taking it, and it fell to the ground. "Ah!" cried the Franks in dismay, "a bad omen for the embassy."

Roland

But Ganelon held his head high, and proudly he took the baton and the letter from the Emperor. Then he went to his lodging, and arrayed himself splendidly for his journey. Coming out, he said farewell to his friends, who wept and lamented at his going, and then, riding out under the high olives, he joined himself to the Saracen embassy.

Blanchandrin rode at his side, and the two talked together of Charlemagne and of his great deeds.

"But," said Blanchandrin, "his wars bring much sorrow and destruction on his own people as well as on others."

"That is true," replied Ganelon, "but it is Roland who is to blame. The Emperor listens always to the counsel of Roland, and Roland is ever for war."

"Then is he cruel and wicked," said Blanchandrin, and Ganelon replied :

"True, but the people love him for the gifts he gives them, and the Emperor will do all that he wills. For him Charlemagne would conquer from Spain to the Orient."

The Saracen saw by the bitterness of Ganelon's words that he hated Roland, and would do him ill. He saw too that this ambassador sent by Charlemagne was no true man, but one who could be brought to treachery.

"Listen to me," he said. "You wish to take vengeance on Roland? By Mahomet, then, deliver him to us."

For the rest of the way Blanchandrin and Ganelon talked together of how best they could destroy Roland, and between them a wicked plan was made. At last they came to Saragossa, and dismounted near to the place where King Marsile was sitting on his throne, under a pine-tree. Ganelon gave his message, and when he had finished the King started up in fury. He had a javelin in his hand, which he made as if he would hurl at Ganelon. The Frank drew his sword a little way from its sheath.

"Murglais," he said to it, "you are bright and beautiful. So long I have borne you at the Court that it shall never be said there that I perished alone in a strange land; many of these Saracens, indeed, shall go with me."

But the Saracens, much desiring peace, cried out, "Stop this

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quarrel!" They persuaded the King, so that he agreed to hear the messenger once more. But when the assembly knew that Charlemagne had threatened to put their King to a shameful death they would have killed the messenger themselves, had not the wise Blanchandrin drawn the King and Ganelon, with a few of the wisest counsellors, apart.

"Ganelon has pledged himself to our cause," he said; and then King Marsile, relieved and triumphant, made haste to offer to the Frank rich gifts, and to make an agreement with him.

"Give the Emperor such treasure that all the Franks shall marvel at it," advised Ganelon. "With the twenty hostages which you shall send him he will return to France. When he reaches the defiles of Sizres the rearguard will be sent back to cover the retreat. With it will be Roland and Oliver, in whom Charlemagne has such great faith. They will have twenty thousand Frenchmen in their company. Send against them a hundred thousand of your paynims, and do battle with them, that they may be smitten and sore hurt. Many of your Saracens will fall also, but afterward do you set upon the Franks a second time with a like army, that Roland may in nowise escape. Whosoever shall compass the death of Roland will thereby smite off the right arm of Charles; his great armies will have an end; never again will he call together such hosts; and the lands shall have peace."

Marsile, in great delight, made Ganelon swear that he would so contrive that Roland should be found with the rearguard, and Ganelon swore on the holy relics in the hilt of his sword. Marsile, for his part, swore on the holy book of Mahomet that he would set upon the rearguard with a great army. The two kissed each other on cheek and chin, and the treacherous covenant was made.

One high-born Saracen after another came to Ganelon and thanked him and paid him honour. Last came Queen Bramimonde, who gave him two bracelets of gold, amethysts, and rubies to bear as a present from her to his wife. Marsile promised him as much gold as ten mules could carry if the plan he had put before them succeeded.

Roland

Then Ganelon departed, taking with him as a gift for Charlemagne seven hundred camels loaded with silver, and also the twenty hostages. When he came to the Emperor he spoke to him with cunning and falsehood.

"Blessed be thou of God. I bring the keys of Saragossa, with great store of gifts and twenty hostages. As for King Marsile, in very truth, lord, this month shall not pass but he will come to thee at Aix and be baptized, and become thy man, and will hold of thee his Kingdom of Spain."

When they heard this, Charlemagne and all his Franks felt great gladness that the terrible war was over at last.

"Thanks be to God," said the Emperor; "well have you done, and great shall be your reward." Then he ordered a thousand trumpets to be sounded throughout the host, that all might know the camp was to be broken up. And the army began its march toward France.

They rode on all that day, and at night pitched their tents on the top of a hill, where Roland set up the Emperor's standard, so that it showed clear against the sky. In the valleys below, meantime, four hundred thousand paynims, fully armed, encamped within a wood. Alas! that the Franks did not know of the danger that approached them.

The dawn came clear and bright, and soon the host was arrayed. The Emperor rode through the lines of his soldiers.

"Barons," he cried, "you see before you the defiles and the narrow pass through which the army must march. Choose, now, who shall command the rearguard."

"Let Roland do it," said Ganelon, "for you have no baron as brave as he"; and Roland answered:

"Sir kinsman, for this word you have spoken I hold you right dear. By my faith, if I command the rearguard, Charlemagne shall lose nothing, neither palfrey nor war-horse nor mule an it be not first well paid for by the sword."

"That I know full well," Ganelon made answer.

The Emperor gave to Roland the charge of the rearguard, saying, "I will leave with you the half of my army that you may pass in safety."

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"Not so, sire," said Roland; "if I kept so many I should disgrace my name and house. Leave me but twenty thousand, and do thou cross the mountains fearing nothing, for as long as I live no harm shall come to you."

Oliver and the rest of the twelve Peers came to Roland's side, declaring they would go with him; and the good Archbishop Turpin came too, and many other valiant lords. They chose out twenty thousand valiant men, and these all watched Charlemagne and his host march away through the dread passes where dark and terrible rocks overhung the way. These all were glad that they would see again their own dear land and their wives and children and the friends they had left so long; but Charlemagne's heart was heavy, and he feared for Roland, whom he loved and who still remained in Spain among the enemies of France.

Meantime the pagan host made ready for battle. The nephew of the King with eleven other nobles led out a hundred thousand men toward Roncesvalles, where Roland and his army lay. Their armour flashed and glittered in the sunlight, and their banners, white and blue and scarlet, fluttered gaily, while their trumpets sounded loud and clear.

"What sound is that?" cried some among the Franks; and Oliver went quickly to the top of a high hill and looked down the valley.

"I see a great host coming," he cried, "thousands of white hauberks and thousands of gleaming helms. They will fall upon us and there will be great slaughter. Ganelon the traitor has done this."

"Peace, Oliver," said Roland. "He is my mother's husband. Speak you no ill of him."

Then Oliver came down from the hill and told all the Franks what he had seen.

"Never was there so great a host of men," he cried; "there are full a hundred thousand. Such a battle we shall have as was never before seen of man." Then he turned to Roland. "The pagans are many," he said, "and we are few. Blow then on your horn of ivory that Charlemagne may hear and return to help us."



ROLAND SETS UP THE EMPEROR'S STANDARD

J. C. Dollman



ROLAND SOUNDS HIS HORN A THIRD TIME

J. C. Dollman

Roland

"Nay," returned Roland, "to do so would be to rob myself of the glory I shall win in this encounter. Rather will I strike good blows and great with Durandal, and deliver the pagans over to death."

Again and again Oliver besought him to sound his horn, saying that there was no shame in asking for help against overwhelming numbers, but still Roland would not listen, so that at last they almost came to a quarrel. But when the Saracens were close upon them and the battle was almost joined Roland turned to Oliver with words of reconciliation.

"Comrade, friend, say not so. Among all our twenty thousand men there is not one coward heart. Lay on with your lance and I will smite with Durandal, my good sword that the Emperor gave me. If I die may he to whom it falls say, 'This is the sword of a goodly vassal.'"

Then came good Archbishop Turpin, and spurring his horse to the crest of a little hill he spoke to the eager host :

"Your Emperor set you here that you might do your duty to him and to France. It is for you to uphold Christianity against the might of the infidel. Come, now, confess your sins and I will absolve you. Then if you are slain you will be holy martyrs and your place will be in the higher Paradise."

All the Franks dismounted from their horses, and the Archbishop blessed them in the name of God. Then, strengthened and encouraged, they mounted once more, and made themselves ready for battle.

At their head rode Roland on his good horse *Veillantif*. As he rode he brandished his spear, turning its point toward heaven. Well-fashioned was his body, and his face fair and laughing ; close behind him rode his comrades. Haughtily he looked on the Saracens, but gently and mildly on the Franks.

"Come now, ride on, and this day you shall have plunder goodly and great such as the Franks have never taken before"; and as he spoke his ranks met those of the Saracens and the battle began.

"Alas, that you would not sound your horn of ivory !" cried

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Oliver once more ; " but, since it is now too late, let us ride on and deal hard blows at the enemy."

So he too rode into the midst of the Saracens. Adelroth, nephew of King Marsile, led them on, and he called out taunting words to the Franks, telling them that that day the glory should depart from France. But not for long did he boast, for Roland, roused to fury, rushed upon him with his spear, and pierced his shield and hauberk so that he fell down dead. As he fell Roland cried, " Ha ha, coward ! France shall not lose her glory. Lay on, Franks ! Ours is the first blow ! Right is with us, and these infidels are in the wrong."

Next came King Marsile's brother, and he too shouted, as he rode, words of insult to France. But Oliver met him and dealt with him as Roland had dealt with Adelroth. The third champion that came on did good Archbishop Turpin slay with his lance, crying, " The first blow is with us, thanks be to God ! "

By that time the Franks and Saracens had joined in battle all over the field, and such valiant deeds were everywhere done that they could not be numbered nor told. Each Frank fought like a hero against the fierce Saracens, and, though many Franks were killed, yet each before he fell had sent many paynims to their death.

Yet still the hosts of the infidels came on, so many that the whole valley was filled with them as far as eye could see, and how many soever the Franks slew it seemed as if still the same number remained. Roland fought with his lance fifteen good blows, and each brought down a man, but then the shaft was shivered and he cast it from him. He drew out Durandal, his good sword, and rode through the press, hurling one Saracen dead upon another, so that bright blood flowed out upon the field. Oliver, too, and the rest of the twelve Peers fought valiantly, and the Archbishop gave more than a thousand blows in the good cause. Fiercer and hotter grew the battle. The pagans died in multitudes, and of the Franks, too, many valiant men were slain. Never did they see their kindred more, nor Charlemagne, who awaited them at the defiles.

Meantime in France a terrible storm arose, wind and lightning,

Roland

thunder, rain and hail out of all measure. Throughout all the land the earth quaked and shook horribly, so that many houses fell, and the walls of cities crumbled. At midday came a great darkness, and men stricken with terror whispered to each other, "This is the end of all things. The day of judgment is at hand." They did not know that in Roncesvalles death was very near to Roland, and that all things mourned for him.

But the time had not quite come, and many more pagans was he to slay with his good sword Durandal before he fell. The Franks fought with more fierceness than ever, and all around them lay heaps of dead ; each Frenchman who fell was terribly avenged. Of the hundred thousand Saracens only two thousand were left, and these were fleeing from the field in fear.

So the Franks rested for a moment, and sought for their own dead among the great heaps of bodies that lay around. Then suddenly came the loud sound of many trumpets, and Roland looked up and saw King Marsile himself coming down the valley with a new host of a hundred thousand men, fresh and eager and fully armed, to meet the wearied Franks with their hacked and broken weapons.

"Oliver," now shouted Roland, "see what this traitor Ganelon has brought upon us. 'Tis clear that here has been treason. See the great multitude that marches against us, and know how sore and heavy will be the battle. Yet take you your sword Hauteclere and I will take Durandal, and they shall serve us, as oft they have served us before, and their praise shall still be chanted by minstrels far and wide."

So again they rushed into the battle, and Archbishop Turpin rallied the wearied troops with brave words.

"Put away now, O valiant Franks, all cowardly thoughts. To-day certain death awaits us. To-morrow not one of us will be living. But of one thing I am well assured. Holy Paradise is ready to receive you, and you will be seated with the saints."

Again the battle raged fiercely, and greater than ever was the slaughter. Again and again the Franks drove back the enemy, but again and again fresh crowds of Saracens swept down upon

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them. It seemed as if there was no end to the hosts that King Marsile had brought. At last there remained only sixty French knights, but these were resolved to sell their lives dearly.

Roland and Oliver saw that all hope of saving the life of even one Frenchman was gone.

"How shall this news be carried to Charlemagne?" said Roland. "I will blow my horn so that he may hear and return."

"Nay," said Oliver, "it is too late. You would not blow your horn when I besought you before the battle, and now that we have fought and are very near to death to sound it would bring shame upon you."

Thus they disputed together, for Oliver held that Roland was to blame for the loss of so many gallant Franks.

"Wise courage is not madness," he said. "Had you taken my counsel, my liege lord had been here and the battle had been ended, and King Marsile had been taken and slain. Woe worth thy prowess, Roland!"

Archbishop Turpin heard their high words and spurred his horse toward them.

"Sir Roland," he said, "and you, Sir Oliver, in God's name cease this strife. Little help shall we now get of your horn. Yet it were better to sound it, for if the Emperor comes he will avenge us, and the paynims will not go away rejoicing. Also he will give us Christian burial, so that our bodies will not be devoured by wolves and dogs."

"Wise and true are your words," said Roland, and he put his horn to his lips and blew with all his might. The sound echoed through the hills, so that it could be heard thirty leagues away. Charlemagne heard it and said, "Our men are at battle." But Ganelon derided the notion, and answered, "Had any but you said so we should have deemed it great falsehood."

Again Roland blew. He was wounded and weak, and in the great effort that he made the blood sprang from his mouth. Again Charlemagne heard it, and said, "They are certainly at battle," and again Ganelon denied it, scoffing and mocking at Roland.

A third time Roland blew, and this time his temple burst,

Roland

and his pain was terrible to see. The Emperor heard, and so did his host, and gallant Duke Naimés rode up.

"There is a battle," he cried; "he who now seeks to deceive you is he who has betrayed Roland. To arms, sire! Raise your battle-cry, and go to the help of your noble vassals."

In haste the Emperor ordered the trumpets to sound through the host, and put all in battle array. "If only we can find Roland alive," said the hurrying warriors, "valiant blows will we strike to save him."

Charlemagne led them on, riding furiously, and all were so eager to reach the scene of battle that they followed, galloping at full speed, while tears rained from their eyes.

"Seize the traitor!" shouted Charlemagne to Bergon, the master of his household, as he passed, "and guard him well."

So Bergon ordered his men to seize Ganelon and chain him up as they would chain a bear, and then bind him ignominiously on the back of a pack-horse; and in this way he rode with the rest.

On they went through the clear light of the evening, praying God to guard Roland until they came, hurrying with feverish anxiety, heeding nothing in their desperate haste to reach him. Loudly their trumpets sounded, answering the blast from the ivory horn.

"God grant we may be in time," cried the old white-bearded Emperor, as he spurred on his horse. "God grant it."

But the way was long, and while help was still very far away Roland felt that his strength was almost gone. He looked out over hill and heath and saw the great multitude of the Frankish dead, and he wept bitterly.

"Never were better warriors seen than you were," he lamented. "May God have mercy upon you and grant you to enter Paradise. You Frankish barons, you died through me, and I could do nothing to save you." He turned to Oliver and spoke in the old tones of love and friendship. "Comrade, let us now go and fight side by side while we may."

Again they went to battle, and their good swords Durandal and Hauteclere flashed over the field, killing where they struck.

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King Marsile came riding furiously against them; with one blow Roland struck off his right hand, and with another the head of his son who rode by him. Then the paynims lost heart.

"These men will die before they own themselves beaten," they cried; and one said to another, "Let us fly!"

Then all Marsile's men turned and fled, and though their leaders called to them furiously, they would not return. Twenty thousand of them had received no wound, but fled as cowards from the field; and at last the King, seeing he could not rally his host, put spurs to his horse and galloped off also.

There remained still the Caliph, King of Ethiopia, who had brought fifty thousand of his people to help King Marsile. They were black, with flat noses and large ears, and were an abhorred race to the Franks. They came swiftly against the small remnant of Roland's company, and the Caliph struck Oliver from behind in the middle of his back. The lance pierced the body and came out through the breast, and Oliver knew that he had received his death-wound. He turned, and with his good sword he smote the Caliph upon his gold-plated helmet, so that his head was split open from the crown to the teeth. Down he fell dead, and Oliver, fainting in his saddle, called to his friend Roland. One look at his face showed Roland that he was smitten to death.

"Alas!" he cried, "now I know not what to do. Alas! fair France, to-day art thou stripped of goodly vassals, thou art fallen and undone."

Oliver, his sight failing, his strength almost gone, struck out feebly in front of him, and the blow fell on Roland's helmet. It pierced the casque, but did not reach his head, and he said gently:

"Comrade, did you this wittingly? I am Roland who loves you."

Then Oliver answered, "I hear, but I cannot see you. Pardon me the blow."

"I pardon you," said Roland, and they embraced very tenderly. But Oliver's strength was failing fast, and he fell from his horse to the ground. Claspings his hands he confessed

Roland

his sins and prayed that God would let him enter Paradise. Then, with a blessing for Roland, and for France his dear country, he died.

When Roland saw the friend he so loved dead before him he turned his face to the east and wept.

"Woe, woe!" he cried, "we who so long have been together are now parted. Never did you a wrong to me or I to you. Since you are dead it is pity that I yet live."

But he could not stay to lament. He turned his horse to survey the field, and lo! of all his host only the Archbishop and one of his nobles were left alive. These three followed the flying enemy and fiercely attacked them. Roland slew twenty, the knight six, the Archbishop five. The Saracens called loudly on their comrades and many rushed back to the attack. Then the good knight fell dead, and Roland, hard pressed, blew once more feebly upon his horn. Feeble as was the blast, Charlemagne heard it.

"My lords," he said, "it goes badly. I can tell from the sound of this horn that Roland is at the point of death. Ride now swiftly, and sound the trumpets."

Then was blown a mighty blast upon the trumpets, so that the enemy heard it and knew that Charlemagne was rushing to the rescue. They made a last desperate attack and pressed hard on the two brave Frenchmen. Then Roland felt his strength and vigour come back to him, and he set spurs to his horse and dashed into the Caliph's ranks, spreading terror and dismay.

"Woeful is this day," said the Ethiopians. "Charlemagne is returning with his host and will soon be upon us. This Roland cannot be conquered. Let us hurl our weapons upon him and leave him."

This they did. Their weapons broke his shield and his hauberk and wounded his horse, which fell dead, but not one of them reached his body.

Now he and the Archbishop were left alone on the field. Turpin was pierced with many wounds, and lay on the ground near to death. Roland hastened to him, took off his helmet and his hauberk, and bound up his wound with strips that he tore

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from his own linen vest. Then he went slowly and painfully over the field, seeking the body of his friend Oliver, and the bodies of the other Peers ; and when he had found them he bore them with pain and difficulty to where the Archbishop lay. Turpin stretched his hands over them and blessed them, and then seeing that Roland had swooned, he rose and tried to go to fetch water for his friend, but his strength failed, and he fell dead.



ROLAND SEEKING THE BODIES OF THE PEERS

After a time Roland revived, and saw the body of the good Archbishop lying before him. He straightened the limbs and crossed the hands upon the breast. Then he took his horn of ivory in one hand, and Durandal in the other, and as far as an arrow can carry from a crossbow he went on toward Spain. At the crest of a little hill, between two trees, very tall and dark, he lay, and again he fell into a swoon.

Near by was a Saracen who lay among the bodies of his people, feigning to be dead. When he saw Roland lying so still and quiet he ran to him, seized Durandal, and tore it from the feeble hand ;

Roland

then he bent down and shouted in his ear, "Conquered is the nephew of Charlemagne."

At this Roland awoke from his swoon. He struck fiercely at the Saracen with his ivory horn so that his helmet was broken and his skull shattered.

"Coward!" cried Roland, strength coming back to him with his rage. He seized Durandal, and vowing that the good sword



CHARLEMAGNE TELLS AUDE OF ROLAND'S DEATH

should not fall into base hands, he struck it upon a rock, trying to break it, but in vain. Again and again he struck, but it neither notched nor broke, and Roland saw that by no means could he destroy it. Then he felt that his time was come. He stretched his body on the ground, his face downward, his head toward the land of the pagans, his ivory horn and his sword under his body. Then he prayed God to pardon his sins and receive him in Paradise, and as he raised his hand to heaven his soul passed from him.

So died Roland, bravest of all the knights of France, most

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loved of Charlemagne and of his Peers. A terrible vengeance did the Emperor take for his death. He came with his great army and pursued the Saracens, and God worked a miracle and made the sun stand still so that the day might be extended and he might finish his pursuit. Thousands of the pagans, fleeing from him, perished in the river Ebro, and, later, Charlemagne fought a great battle in which he defeated not only Marsile and his followers, but also a great host that had come over the sea from Babylon to help their brother infidels.

Charlemagne ordered the bodies of Roland and Oliver and the Archbishop to be wrapped in silk, placed in caskets of white marble, and thus borne back to France. There they were laid in white sarcophagi at St Romain, where they remain to this day.

When the dread news was told to Aude, the lovely sister of Oliver to whom Roland was betrothed, her gentle heart was broken. She fell lifeless before the Emperor, and was buried with high honour in the great church at Aix.

As for Ganelon, him they charged with treason and treachery and tried in the council. He demanded the wager of battle, so champions were appointed, and in a meadow outside Aix the combat took place, while the people prayed, "O God, make manifest the right." Deadly was the struggle, but the Emperor's champion prevailed. Then it was determined that Ganelon should die a shameful and terrible death, and his body was torn to pieces by wild horses. So perished the traitor.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CID

THE Cid, the great national hero of Spain, was a Castilian prince born in Burgos during the second half of the eleventh century. His name was Rodrigo (or Ruy) Diaz; he is known as 'the Cid' because some Moorish Chiefs whom he captured saluted him as *Cid*, or 'lord.' Later on he was also called 'Campeador,' that is 'Conqueror.'

The real Cid, we may conclude, was not quite the gentleman without reproach of the poem, which was written at least fifty years after the death of Diaz, when the traditions concerning him had magnified his exploits and cast a halo upon his character.

The unknown poet had probably read or heard *The Song of Roland*, as here and there are incidents the source of which can be traced to the *Song*, but these are unimportant, and the entire Poem is inspired by a national feeling that is truly Spanish.

At the time of Rodrigo's birth the Moors had conquered the whole of Spain except the mountainous regions of the north, where a few small Christian states kept up the warfare with the infidel. Under the leadership of the Cid the Spaniards at length regained all their lost territory except the kingdom of Granada in the south-eastern corner.

The Cid, as he is pictured in the poem, was a knight accomplished in all the usages of chivalry, and he had the stately dignity and the attractive grace which a haughty and beauty-loving people such as the Spaniards required in their national hero. He was romantically generous, and ideally loyal and faithful. The many ballads made about him speak of him in terms of almost worshipping praise.

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THE old knight, Don Diego, chief of one of the proudest families of Castile, sat alone in his chamber. His grey head was bowed, and slow tears were falling on the feeble hands that lay helplessly on his trembling knees. Kinsfolk and servants came to the door beseeching him to tell his trouble and let them try to help him; entreating that he would at least take the food which was so necessary to his weakness. But he sent them all away, and sat on, hour after hour, through the long days and nights, neither sleeping nor moving, brooding in bitter humiliation over his grief.

At length, when three days had passed, the anxious watchers at his door heard his voice, very low and feeble, but clear.

"Bid my son, Rodrigo, come to me," he said, and joyfully the young man was summoned. He came quickly into his father's presence, but the old man raised his thin hand and checked his son's eager words.

"Rodrigo," he said, "I have sent for you, my son, because I am now too old to meet a foe in battle, be the insult that must be avenged never so deadly. Listen to the story of your father's shame. Don Gomez, my bitter foe, came to me as I sat among the nobles of Castile, and in the pride of his strength spoke to me bitter, scornful words, which I answered with words as bitter; and then"—the old man turned his head, for he could not look into his son's eyes as the shameful tale was told—"he struck me full in the face, and I dared not challenge him to combat since my hand was too weak to grasp a sword."

Rodrigo started. A moment before his face had been full of anxious love, now it blazed with fiercest anger.

"Grieve not, my father," he cried, "I will avenge you. I am young. My arm is strong, and that shall the caitiff Gomez find. Give me your sword, the sword that has won you honour which no coward enemy can take from you, and bless me, my father, before I go."

He knelt, and the old man blessed him, looking with love and pride on the boyish figure that was moved by so brave a spirit. Then, after looking carefully to his arms and equipment, Rodrigo mounted his horse and rode toward the castle of the enemy.

The Cid

Three days later he returned, bearing a dreadful trophy—the bleeding head of Don Gomez. His father's wrong had been avenged.

Don Diego scarce knew what to do in his joy at his son's courage and the recovery of his own honour.

"Great glory is yours, my son," he said, "that you, a strippling, have overcome in your first encounter a seasoned knight. High will your place be among the nobles of Spain and in the Court of the King. Come now, we will array ourselves, and I will bring you to Ferdinand, who will know how to value so strong an arm and so brave a heart."

But Rodrigo, though he obeyed his father's command without remonstrance, went with unwilling step and gloomy brow. In his youthful pride he hated the thought of doing homage even to a king, and when his father bade him bend the knee before Ferdinand's throne he obeyed with so dark a brow and so haughty a flung-back head that the act was more like a defiance than a submission.

Ferdinand marked the youth's proud bearing and resented it, speaking coldly to him. As the days passed he noted how the other young nobles of the Court gathered round Rodrigo, drawn by the fame of his victory over Don Gomez and by the wonderful charm which even in these youthful days made all who came near him own him as their leader.

"This lad is dangerous," thought Ferdinand, fearful for the safety of his throne, on which he felt his seat was not too secure; "'tis time that I should rid my Court of him."

On an excuse of some slight disregard of Court rules an edict of banishment was issued against Rodrigo, who was nothing loth to go. With him went three hundred of the younger knights of the Court, and the fiery band rode joyfully out, bent on adventure.

They had not far to go before they found what they sought. It happened at that time that the Moors had gathered a large army and were marching on Castile. Rodrigo's three hundred followers were but a handful compared to their mighty host, yet the impetuous lad did not hesitate for a moment. Raising the

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battle-cry of Spain he rushed upon them and his loyal band followed.

To the Moors this sudden desperate onset, led by a young knight who rode like a whirlwind, and rained down blows like a death-dealing god, seemed something uncanny and terrifying. They gave way before it with little thought of resistance. Their great host was scattered far and wide, and five kings were taken prisoner. These were brought before Rodrigo, bound and helpless, expecting sentence of instant death.

The youthful knight looked at them sternly. "Your lives are forfeit," he said, "but I will spare you if you will promise never again to take arms against Spain, and to pay tribute to Ferdinand its rightful King.

Scarcely believing their ears, the Moors eagerly promised, and quickly left Rodrigo's presence, saying to each other as they went :

"This, truly, is a great man. He has routed our hosts and made us, kings as we are, vassals of Spain."

Ferdinand, when he heard what Rodrigo had done, received him back into favour, though he still felt some fear of such a powerful follower. But the young knight found that his great deeds had roused much jealousy among the baser of the nobles, and he found, too, an accuser who besought the King to call Rodrigo to account for the slaying of Don Gomez. This was a very beautiful Spanish maiden named Ximena, the daughter of the dead man. She passionately appealed to the King to avenge her father's death, and tauntingly called on Rodrigo to kill her as he had killed her father, since life was now worthless to her.

But the King refused to give judgment against a knight who had done such good service in battle with the Moors, and though Ximena came day after day, giving him no rest from her pleadings, it was all in vain.

At length the King noticed that her prayers grew less passionate and that she came less often, until one day she appeared with a new petition.

"Something you owe me for a father's death, O King," she said: "I have besought you to give me vengeance, and you have



XIMENA DEMANDS JUSTICE
Willy Pogány

The Cid

refused. Now I ask a new boon. Give me Rodrigo to be my husband. I have heard much of his great deeds since I have been here at Court and I have seen his courage and skill in the lists. I desire no other husband than he."

The King looked at Rodrigo, expecting him to answer the petition with a scornful refusal, but to his amazement Rodrigo joyfully assented. The maiden's beauty and grief had won his love even when she had been his bitter enemy; and now that her heart had changed toward him he was ready with great joy to become her faithful and loving husband.

The wedding was celebrated with great ceremony and rejoicing, and the King gave Rodrigo four cities as his marriage gift. Rodrigo vowed that by his devotion he would make up to his wife for the wrong he had done her.

A man I slew—a man I give thee—
Here I stand thy will to bide !
Thou, in place of a dead father,
Hast a husband by thy side.

To show how highly he honoured his bride, Rodrigo declared that he would not consider he was worthy of her love until he had won five battles and could lay the spoils at her feet. First, he said, he would go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella, the shrine of the patron saint of Spain, to ask his blessing; and then he would hasten against the armies of the infidel Moors.

Ximena rejoiced to find that her husband was pious as well as brave, and she parted from him with smiles and brave words, as a soldier's wife should do. He set off joyfully with twenty knights as his companions, and on the way a wonderful adventure befell him.

His heart was so full of love and happiness that he felt a great pity for all who were less happy than he was, and he tried, by alms and gentle words and services, to relieve any he met who were sick or in trouble. One day, on the road, he passed a leper, poor and miserable and dirty, shunned by all because of his loathsome disease. Rodrigo took the unhappy creature with him to the village inn, washed his disfigured body, and set him

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at the same table with himself at supper. Then, because the host of the inn would have no dealings with a leper, Rodrigo took him to his own room, and gave him half of his own bed.

In the middle of the night Rodrigo awoke, and looked to see if all was well with his companion. The place was empty ; the man had gone. Much troubled, he was about to go in search of him, when he saw a shining figure standing by the bed.



THE CID AND THE LEPER

“ Rodrigo,” it said, “ I am Lazarus, the leper, once poor and despised upon earth, but now Saint Lazarus, happy in the blessed mansions of heaven. Because you showed brotherly love to one whom God had afflicted, God will show His love for you in the face of your enemies.

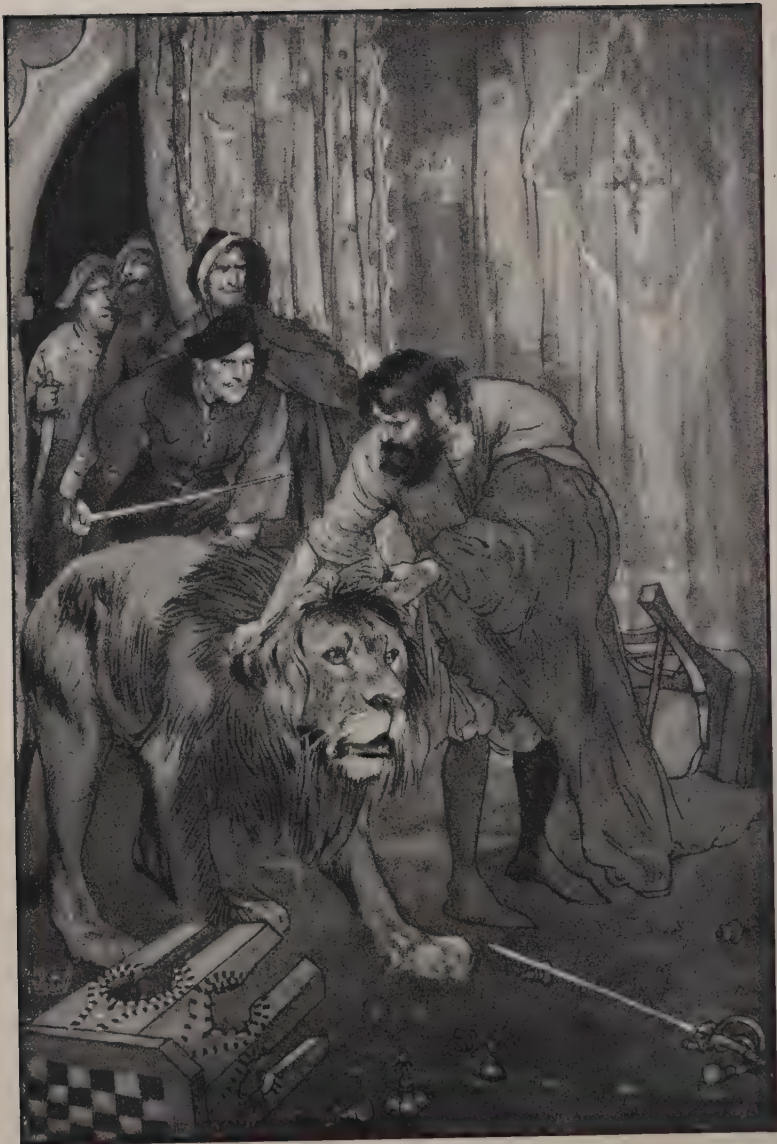
Life shall bring thee no dishonour—
Thou shalt ever conqueror be ;
Death shall find thee still victorious,
For God's blessing rests on thee.



THE CID IS MERCIFUL TO THE CONQUERED

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THE CID AND THE LION
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The Cid

Then Rodrigo, in love and thankfulness, vowed that he would set aside a large sum of money to build a house for his afflicted brothers, the lepers, and when he returned home he did so, dedicating the house to Saint Lazarus. Then with a brave heart he set off for the wars.

He did many marvellous deeds, and the name of 'The Cid,' which had been given to him by the Moorish kings, became the one by which he was known throughout the hosts of both the Christians and the infidels. He took part in five battles, as he had set himself to do, and returned to his wife with much spoil taken from the enemy.

While the Cid was yet in his early manhood King Ferdinand died, leaving his dominions to be divided among his three sons and his two daughters. Then came a terrible time of war and bloodshed. The eldest son, Don Sancho, was determined to get the entire kingdom into his hands, and by cunning and violence and treachery he almost managed to do so. Through it all he tried to keep the Cid on his side, for he knew the value of his help; but Rodrigo, though he was loyal, and would not fight against Sancho, whom he considered to be his lawful King, was often saddened and disgusted by the other's crooked dealings, and gave him only half-hearted help. Sometimes he refused altogether to take part in the campaigns. Once Sancho, enraged at Rodrigo's lukewarmness, banished him from the country, but was soon glad to recall him, since nothing could be done without his help.

At last, while Sancho was besieging the city of Zamora, which belonged to one of his sisters, he was murdered by a citizen of Zamora who came to him pretending he was willing to betray the city into his hands. The assassin managed to get back in safety, though the Cid, on his famous horse Babieça, pursued him to the city's gates.

This foul act revived all the Cid's loyalty to Sancho, and he declared publicly that he would pay no homage to Alfonzo, who now succeeded to his brother's possessions, until the new King had sworn a solemn oath that he had had nothing to do with Sancho's murder. Alfonzo dared not refuse, for the Cid was so

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powerful that no one who wished to hold the troubled throne of Spain could venture lightly to offend him. So he took the oath, and received the allegiance of his powerful subject, but he never forgot the humiliation he had suffered, and he waited eagerly for an opportunity of revenge.

The Cid had many enemies among those who were jealous of his fame, and these, when they saw the coldness with which the King treated him, hastened with lying tales of disloyal and treasonable words that he had spoken and of plots that he had formed against the new ruler. Alfonzo was only too ready to believe, and, being thus supported by his nobles, he issued a decree of banishment against the Cid. Nine days were given him to make his preparations and cross the Spanish border; after that it was death for him to be found within Alfonzo's dominions. Any house that gave him shelter was to be utterly destroyed.

Rodrigo heard the sentence unmoved, and did not deign to utter one word of entreaty or complaint. "I hope," he said quietly, "that the time will never come when the King will have need of the strong arm which he now sends from him."

Calmly he made his preparations, and on the ninth morning he rode out from the gates of his castle and through the streets of Burgos toward his exile. There was mourning and weeping in the city, for the people loved Rodrigo and dreaded to think what would become of their country when he was no longer there to defend it. But they dared not offer him help or shelter for fear of the anger of Alfonzo; only sixty knights, his trusty comrades, braving the royal anger, rode with him through the silent, gloomy streets and out beyond the gates.

Outside the city the little band encamped and held a council to decide what they should do. All their property was forfeit to the King, and they had not between them more than a few gold pieces.

"Our swords shall win us gold," said the Cid; "the cities of the infidel contain much treasure, and that shall be ours. Meanwhile money we must have. Find me therefore two chests,

The Cid

large and strong, with trusty fastenings, such as are used to store things of great value."

Antolinez, one of his vassals, procured the chests, and then the Cid ordered him to fill them with sand and lock them securely.

"Go now to the Jews, Raquel and Vidas," he said, "tell them that I have much treasure which I cannot take with me when I go to fight with the Moors, and ask the Jews to lend me a sum of money upon it. I call God and His saints to witness that I do this thing because I am driven to extremity, and for the sake of those who depend upon me."

Antolinez, a little doubtful as to how his proposals would be received, went to the Jews.

"The Cid is going out against the Moors," he said, "and would leave two chests, which contain all the treasure he possesses, in your charge, as security for a sum of money he wishes to borrow to pay the expenses of his campaign. Only you must pledge yourself not to open the chests for a year and a day."

"That we will do," said the Jews readily. "What sum of money does the illustrious Cid require?"

"Six thousand marks," replied Antolinez.

"It is a large sum," said Raquel, "but we will lend it willingly, for the treasure contained in these chests must be very great."

"The Cid is in haste," went on Antolinez, "and would have the money sent to him forthwith."

"Nay," said Vidas, "first we must see him and the chests, that the business may be carried through in due form. Take us to him."

So Antolinez took the two Jews to his master, who talked to them of his plans and of his need. He showed them the chests, and they were delighted at their great weight. Willingly they paid over the six thousand marks, and they did not forget to reward Antolinez for his share in the business. Then they went back to their homes very well pleased, taking the chests with them.

All was now ready, and the Cid, after paying a sorrowful

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visit to the convent where his wife and his two daughters were sheltered, rode out against the infidel. By this time more than a hundred and fifty men had gathered round him, and hour by hour more and more came flocking in, among them some of the bravest and best fighting men in Spain. Their hearts filled with devotion toward their leader, the little band of exiles crossed the border and entered the land ruled over by the Moors.

Then began a campaign so full and so glorious that it would be impossible to tell here even one-tenth of the gallant deeds of the Cid and the victories that he won. Town after town was taken—rich and splendid Moorish towns where treasure of gold and silver and gems and precious stuffs and fine embroideries were gathered up by the victors in such quantities that the poorest gentleman in the band grew richer than any stay-at-home grandee of Spain.

The Moors came against them in their thousands, gathering huge armies, and throwing themselves in wrath against these daring Christian invaders who had marched so proudly into their land and were taking their fairest cities and slaying their most gallant warriors. They hoped by numbers to crush this insignificant enemy; but the Cid was a wise commander as well as a brave fighter, and many of his victories were won by strategy rather than by force of arms. But when the time came for an open battle then there was none so happy as Rodrigo, none so gay, and confident, and full of courage. Out he rode upon his good steed Babieça, his famous sword Tizona in his hand.

“Strike, gentleman of old Castile, strike for the Holy Rood!” he would cry, and his gallant band, eager as hounds unleashed, would answer his call nobly. Where the Cid led they followed, and the infidels fell by hundreds before them. Their bright blades made a path through the close ranks, until terror entered into the hearts of the foe, and they galloped in wild disorder from the field where so many of their brothers lay slain.

So time after time the Cid triumphed, and the poets of Spain sang, as they still sing, of his brave deeds. He was merciful to those whom he conquered, only binding them to pay him tribute;

The Cid

he allowed no cruelty to be practised by any of his band, and the Moors, though they feared and hated him as a conqueror, knew that he never broke his word and could be trusted in all things.

Yet all through the three years in which he went from glory to glory and made himself a deathless name, his loyal and loving heart longed for his country, his King, his wife and his children, longed to make its peace with the ungrateful Alfonzo and stand again, a trusted, valued servant, by his side. Each time a rich city fell into his hands he sent part of the spoil to the King, with a loyal message, and Alfonzo gradually softened toward the exile and his followers. He gave full permission to any who wished to join the Cid's band, and he pardoned several of those who had been exiled with him ; but he still held back from a full reconciliation with the Cid himself.

At the end of three years thousands of Christians had joined the Cid's banner and were living happily under his rule in the land of the Moors. Then, seeing that he had so large an army, the great leader decided to march against Valencia, which was the Moorish capital and a city of untold beauty and riches. For nine months he besieged it, and in the tenth month it surrendered. Then the King of Seville, thinking that the Christians would overrun all the land, brought a great army of thirty thousand men against him, and this army the Cid defeated in a great battle. This victory made him so powerful that the Moors themselves looked upon him as King of that part of the country.

But the Cid still yearned after his own land, his King, and his wife and children, and he sent messengers again to Alfonzo, with rich presents, begging that Ximena and her two daughters might be allowed to come to him in Valencia. The King granted his request, and very joyfully the three came to join him.

When the two Jews, Raquel and Vidas, heard that a messenger from the Cid was at the Court, they came to him, reminding him that the term for which their money had been lent had long expired, and asking what was to be done in the matter. So great was their faith in the Cid that during all the four years

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he had been away from the country they had not opened the chests he had left with them, but had rested quite content that the money they had lent would be repaid.

"It shall be repaid with generous interest," answered the messenger; "the Cid has taken such great treasure from the Moors that the sum you lent is but as a drop in the great ocean of his riches. Yet is he mindful of the help you gave him in his need, and before this would have requited it fully, had not his constant warfare with the infidels left him no time for his own affairs. Wait but a little longer and payment shall be made."

Quite contented, Raquel and Vidas went home, and before many days had passed messengers arrived bringing treasure of far greater worth than the money they had lent; and these messengers told the two Jews what the chests really held. "Speak thus to Raquel and Vidas," the Cid had commanded them:

"Say, albeit within the coffers,
Naught but sand they can espy,
That the pure gold of my truth,
Deep beneath that sand doth lie."

The time had now come when Alfonzo felt he could no longer refuse to be reconciled to the man who had done such great things for Spain and for the Christian faith. So he sent a gracious message to the Cid bidding him return to Spain, and at the same time he told him that two Counts, the Infantes of Carrion, sons of one of the greatest nobles of Castile, had asked for the hands of his two daughters in marriage.

The Cid knew something of these Counts of Carrion, and he felt that they were not the husbands he would have desired for the daughters he loved so well; but because the King wished it, and because he was very anxious that nothing might hinder his reconciliation with Alfonzo, he agreed to the proposal.

"What the King desires is my pleasure," he said. "Be it as God and the King wills."

Without delay he set out from Valencia for Alfonzo's Court, and when he drew near to the royal city the King came out to

The Cid

meet him. Then the proud warrior, the victor in so many battles, knelt down before Alfonzo and took the grass of the field in his mouth to show his humility and his devotion. The King took his hand and raised him, showing him great affection, and brought him to the royal castle, where a splendid banquet was prepared. So the Cid came home with honour to the country he had left as a poor and sorrowful exile.

He could not be long absent from Valencia, so after a few days of feasting and rejoicing he returned, taking with him the two Counts, Fernan and Diego, his daughters' suitors. Preparations for the marriage were begun at once, and as soon as they were completed Donna Elvira and Donna Sol were wedded, with great pomp and splendour, to the Infantes of Carrion. The festivities lasted for fifteen days, and there was jousting and tilting, and warlike sport. Some of the noblest knights in Spain entered the lists to gain glory in the eyes of the fair ladies who looked on. The Cid watched his two sons-in-law closely, and was delighted to see that they bore themselves gallantly in all the encounters. He began to hope that the marriages might turn out better than, from what he knew of the two Counts, he had feared they might do.

But these hopes did not last long. The Counts were in no hurry to leave Valencia, where they were so well entertained, and for two years they remained in the city, idling away their time without thought of gaining glory, or of the service they owed to their country. They showed themselves the poor-spirited, selfish, false creatures that in truth they were. Sadly the Cid felt his hopes fade and his fears return; until an incident occurred which showed these two Counts, who had thought themselves worthy to woo the daughters of the bravest knight in Spain, as cowards to be jeered at and despised.

The Cid, like most of the great Spanish nobles of his day, kept a private menagerie of wild beasts, who were brought out to fight at the public sports. It happened one day that a lion, a fierce and terrible creature, by some mischance broke loose from his cage and entered the hall of the palace. The Cid lay sleeping on a couch, and the two Counts sat near him playing

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chess. Suddenly they heard a low roar, and, looking up, they saw the dread beast a few paces from them.

Wild with terror they sprang up, throwing down the table, and scattering the chessmen over the floor. One of the brothers threw himself on the floor, trying in an agony of fear to hide under the couch where the Cid lay. The other rushed from the hall, and, seeing a great winepress standing outside, attempted to take refuge within it, but fell over the edge, tearing his richly bedecked robes.

The followers of the Cid, hearing the tumult, rushed to where their master lay. He had wakened from his sleep, and now made his way calmly toward the lion. Taking it by its mane, he led the beast, who was quite docile under his hand, back to its cage. When it had been secured once more he and his followers had time to look for the two Counts of Carrion. There lay one, white and trembling, under the couch, trying to draw the draperies closer and closer round him to hide him from the beast whose terrible head he imagined to be very near him. The other was found cowering in the empty vat, bruised and bleeding, with torn clothing and hands stained with the dregs of the wine.

When they at length understood that the danger was over they came out from their hiding-places to meet the jests and laughter of the crowd of nobles and attendants that had assembled; and the haughty young noblemen never forgave that laughter nor the jests which, from that day forth, were made against them. They dared not show open resentment, so they hid their rage in their hearts, and waited an opportunity for revenge.

Very soon after this matter of the lion news came to Valencia that the King of Morocco was sending a great army to invade the city. The Cid and his warriors received the news with rejoicing.

"Now shall we smite the heathen once more, as we smote him in the days when we were poor exiles, working out our pardon," they cried. "Too long have we idled in this pleasant city, feasting and living softly. Now for the camp and the field,

The Cid

and the fierce joy of battle, when our horses bear us into the press and the foe goes down before our gleaming swords."

But the two Counts of Carrion did not share this warrior's joy. "What care we for the infidel?" they said to each other. "Why should we stay longer with the Cid and his warriors, who live only to fight? Far better would it be for us to live peaceably on our own estates, without all this talk of courage and glory and a deathless name."

Yet for shame's sake they could not turn their backs on the city now that it was in danger of being besieged, nor refuse their help to their great father-in-law. But they went into the field unwillingly, and fought in such half-hearted fashion, with such care for their own skins, that they gained among the proud and fearless Castilian warriors the name of laggards and cowards.

No one told the Cid how ill they bore themselves; instead, his devoted followers tried to hide from him the worthlessness of his sons-in-law, knowing what pain the knowledge would give him. More than once some brave knight among the band allowed one of the Counts to take the credit for a valiant deed that he himself had performed. So that when the campaign was won and the enemy driven away the proud commander as he led his weary troops back into the city said to the nobles nearest to him, "Now that they are brave they will be welcomed by the brave," and he looked at the two Counts, who had taken their places in the foremost rank of the army.

The Infantes of Carrion heard him, and were furiously angry. Though they knew they were cowards, they could not bear that another should doubt their courage. "Now that they are brave, indeed!" they said to each other. "We do not wish these proud Castilians to think that they are doing us a favour by welcoming us. We will leave Valencia and go back to our own lands, taking our wives with us. They at least are in our power, and it will be strange if we cannot avenge ourselves through them on their haughty father."

They told the Cid that they wished to return to their home, and although his heart was sad at parting with his daughters yet he did not try to keep the Counts against their will. He

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loaded them with costly presents, and, as the most precious gift of all, he gave them the two famous swords, Colada and Tizona, that he had taken from the Moors in battle.

Early in the morning the Counts and their train set off. Ximena wept bitterly at losing sight of her two daughters, for her heart misgave her that their husbands were not wholly to be trusted. She begged her nephew, Felez Munoz, to go with them and keep watch, and he promised to serve and guard his two cousins faithfully.

For some days all went well, and then came a night when tents were pitched in a glade in the great forest of Corpes. In the morning the two Counts bade all their train ride on ahead, and then, when they were left alone with the ladies Elvira and Sol, they took the saddle-girths from their horses and with them beat their unhappy wives most furiously.

The proud, high-born ladies felt the disgrace even more deeply than they felt the pain. "Kill us," they entreated; "show us so much mercy. Let us not live, dishonoured and abased." But their despicable husbands only laughed at them and mocked their sufferings; and at last, when they had satisfied their wicked will, they threw the bodies of the two poor ladies on the ground, leaving them for dead.

"Now," said the brothers gleefully, as they mounted their horses and rode off, "we are avenged on the proud Cid and his followers who jeered at us for the affair of the lion."

But the two ladies were not long left helpless and deserted. Felez Munoz, true to his promise, was on the watch, and when he saw the two Counts rejoin the train without their wives, he managed, unnoticed, to slip back to the place of the night's camp. There he found his cousins, lying on the ground, their clothes hanging in ribbons, their tender bodies bruised and bleeding, their eyes closed, their faces white as death. Quickly he raised them, and found that they still breathed. He gave them wine from his flask, bathed their wounds with water from the stream, and bound them up with strips torn from his own clothing. Then he rode quickly to the nearest town, and after sending swift messengers to Valencia to tell the Cid what had

The Cid

happened he brought clothing and horses for his injured cousins, and tenderly and carefully brought them back to their father's home.

The rage and grief of the Cid when he heard of the ill-treatment of his daughters were terrible to see. He said little, but his eyes blazed and his hands shook as he sat brooding deeply over the foul insult his family had received. When Donna Elvira and Donna Sol arrived he received them lovingly and calmly.

"Welcome, my daughters," he said. "God keep you from evil. I accepted this marriage because I dared not do otherwise. God grant that I may see you better married hereafter, and that I may have my revenge upon my sons-in-law of Carrion."

He sent messengers to King Alfonzo telling of the wrong done to his daughters, and praying for justice. The King was very angry, and at once summoned the Counts to appear before his Court at Toledo. They tried to make excuses, but the King insisted on their presence, and so at length they came, bringing with them a great crowd of friends and dependants. The Cid also came with his train, and when all were present the King spoke.

"Princes, barons, and hidalgos," he said, "I have summoned you here that justice may be done to the Cid Campeador. As you all know, foul wrong has been done his daughters, and I have set judges to search out the right; for wrong I will not have in Christian Spain. I swear by the bones of St Isidor that he who disturbs my Court shall quit my kingdom and forfeit my love. He who shall prove his right, on his side am I. Now let the Cid make his demand, and we shall hear the answer of the lords of Carrion."

Then up rose the Cid, a noble figure, tall and stately; his long beard and his white hair gave him the dignity of age, though his form was not bent, and his dark eyes shone as brightly as in his youth.

"My lord the King," he said, "it is not I alone whom the lords of Carrion have wronged, but you yourself also, who gave them my daughters in marriage. Grievous is the charge I must bring against them. Yet first I will ask that my gifts to them

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may be restored. Let them give me back my good swords, Colada and Tizona."

Fernan and Diego hastened to hand back the swords, and began to hope, from this beginning, that their father-in-law would be more easily appeased than they had expected. The Cid turned to his two faithful followers, Felez Munoz and Martin Antolinez.

"Take you the swords," he said, "for you will use them worthily, to the honour of God and of Spain."

Then, continuing his demands, he said :

"My liege, when the Counts left Valencia I bestowed upon them three hundred marks in gold and silver. Let them now restore this, since they are no longer my sons-in-law."

But at this the greedy Counts made a great outcry. "We cannot restore it," they said. "We must sell our lands at Carrion and beggar ourselves to pay back such a sum."

"Nevertheless," answered the King sternly, "it must be done, and done now. The money must be paid into the Court."

So with sullen faces and angry hearts the Counts set about collecting the money they had declared they could not pay. They brought their horses and their jewels and treasure, they borrowed money from their nobles and from whomsoever would lend to them, and at last the sum was made up.

"Now," said the Cid, "these are but trifles. I come now to the real charge I have to bring against these traitorous cowards. They have insulted and ill-treated my daughters, whom you, O gracious King, gave them as their wives, and in doing so they have dishonoured the high majesty of Spain. I call upon them to defend themselves in the lists against the champion who shall be appointed to take up my daughters' cause."

Then Count Garcia, who was on the side of the Infantes, began to speak in their defence, saying scornfully that since the brothers were of royal blood the daughters of the Cid were no fit mates for them, and might be cast off with whatever ignominy their husbands chose to put upon them. And after him Fernan, the elder of the brothers, rose, approving what he had said.

"What!" cried Pero Bermuez, a follower of the Cid, "you

The Cid

claim that your coward deed is justified by your princely blood ! This is strange doctrine to be heard before the King's Majesty."

"Not so !" cried those on the other side, "'tis no coward deed, but an act of justice."

Then many voices were raised, and the dispute grew hot ; and in the midst of it there came into the hall Azur Gonzalez, a haughty vassal of the Counts of Carrion. He was heated with wine, his clothes were disordered, and he swaggered rudely into the presence of the King.

"What is all this to-do about ? " he cried. "Who is the Cid that nobles should concern themselves with a few stripes laid on the backs of his miserable daughters by the Infantes of Carrion ? Why——"

But at that up sprang the furious followers of the Cid, their swords in their hands ; all cried for vengeance, but the voice of one, Muno Gustioz, rose above the tumult.

"Knave !" he shouted, "drunken, ill-born rogue, you who never kept faith with man nor spoke truth before God. The only boon I ask of the King is that you and I may meet where I may cut your lying tongue from your throat !"

"Enough !" cried Alfonso, "it shall be done. You two shall meet in the lists. Break up the Court."

In great disorder and excitement the nobles began to leave the Court, when two cavaliers entered, craving leave to speak. They were ambassadors from the Princes of Navarre and Arragon, and came to entreat the King to bestow the hands of the Cid's daughters upon their masters. This sign of honour shown to the ladies by men of the highest rank soothed the wounded feelings of the Cid, and was received by his followers with loud murmurs of joy and triumph.

"Will you give your daughters to these noble suitors ? " asked Alfonso ; and the Cid bowed low, saying, "If it is your will, O King."

So the ambassadors rode quickly back to their masters to make ready for the wedding, and the Cid and his followers set about their preparations for the trials by combat which were to be fought the next day.

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But the cowardly Counts of Carrion were dismayed at the idea of answering for their deeds in the lists. "We have no arms and no horses fitted for the combat," they pleaded; "we cannot come on the morrow. It will be many days ere we can be ready."

They begged so persistently that at last the King in scorn granted their request.

"Laggards that you are!" he said, "I grant you three weeks to prepare for the lists. See that when the day comes you are ready. The fight shall be fought in your own land of Carrion, so that none may say the Cid's champion had any unfair advantage. Get you back to your country."

When the day came for the combat the Cid and his champions, Pero Burmuez, Martin Antolinez and Muno Gustioz, were there, armed and eager to begin; but the coward spirits of Fernan and Diego shrank, now the hour was come, from upholding the proud words they had spoken. They brought a large company of men with them, hoping to get a chance to slay the Cid's champions in the night; but a good watch was kept, and their plan failed.

Then they made complaint to the King that the Cid's champions bore enchanted swords, Colada and Tizona, and prayed that they might be forbidden to use them. But Alfonzo refused to listen.

"You have swords of your own," he said sharply. "Let them suffice you, and see that you wield them like men, for, believe me, there will be no shortcoming on the part of the Cid's champions."

Seeing that there was no escape, the brothers very reluctantly made themselves ready for the lists. A great concourse of people was assembled, and the judges were of the noblest warriors in Spain.

The trumpets sounded, the Cid's three champions leapt eagerly upon their horses and rode gaily out. The Counts, with Azur Gonzalez, faced them, spite and sullen anger in their hearts. Then cried King Alfonzo:

"Hear what I say, Counts of Carrion. This combat you

The Cid

should have fought at Toledo, but you would not, so I have brought these three cavaliers to your own land to meet you. Take your right ; seek no wrong ; who attempts it, ill betide him."

The great combat began, and each knight, holding his shield before him and grasping his lance, dashed upon his opponent. Bermuez and Fernan met with a mighty shock, and each one's



FERNAN CRIED FOR QUARTER

lance struck on the other's shield ; but that of Fernan splintered before it could pass his opponent's defence, while Pero's shaft pierced through the Count's corselet and entered his breast, and Fernan fell heavily from his horse. Then Tizona, the bright blade, flashed out ready to descend, but Fernan cried for quarter. "I yield!" he cried; "you have the victor's right."

Meanwhile Antolinez and Diego had been fighting furiously. At the first attack both their lances splintered, so both drew their swords. The first thrust from Colada pierced Diego's

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casque and cut half the hair from his head. Terrified, he wheeled his horse and fled, his adversary pursuing. Antolinez, scorning to fight so poor a creature, struck him across the shoulders with the flat of his sword. The coward as he felt the blade touch him screamed aloud, and spurring his horse dashed across the boundary of the lists, thus, though unwounded, owning himself vanquished.

The third combat between Muno Gustioz and Azur Gonzalez was swift and decisive. Gustioz pierced the shield of his opponent and drove his lance right through his breast, so that it stuck out a full fathom between the shoulder-blades. The arrogant Azur fell to the ground with only enough life in him to beg for mercy.

So the trial by combat ended in victory for all three of the Cid's champions, and they returned triumphantly to Valencia to tell their master that the insult he had suffered was fully avenged.

The marriage of Donna Elvira and Donna Sol took place soon afterward, and in the Prince of Navarre and the Prince of Arragon they found husbands who held them and their father in high honour, and in their happiness they almost forgot the misery caused them by the worthless Counts of Carrion.

For five years the Cid lived peaceably and happily, with his family and his friends around him: then once more came the call to battle. News was brought that Bucar, King of Morocco, was marching with a great army to besiege Valencia. The old warrior hesitated not a moment, but, eager and fearless as in the days of his youth, he began at once to gather his army and make ready for the fight.

All day he laboured, cheering his people with high, courageous words, and feeling all his old ardour for battle returning. But at night St Peter appeared to him in a vision and bade him prepare not for battle, but for death. "Within thirty days, O Rodrigo, thou must die; yet in death thou shalt still triumph over thy country's enemies. For God hath been well pleased with the good fight thou hast waged, for so many years, against the infidel, and He grants thee now that they shall flee from thee dead as they have fled from thee living."

The Cid

Calmly and happily the Cid received his summons, never doubting that the vision had been from God. He chose from his followers one who should succeed him, and strictly charged all the people that they should not mourn his death, lest the Moors should hear their lamentations and come on with greater boldness. "When I am dead," he said, "see that you embalm my body and set it upon my good steed, Babieça. Place my sword, Tizona, in my hand, and lead me out in the forefront of



TOMB OF THE CID AND XIMENA AT SAN PEDRO DE CARDENA

the battle. If you do this God will give you a great victory over your foes."

On the thirtieth day, according to the word that St Peter had spoken, the Cid died. His followers obeyed the commands he had given them. They fastened him on the back of his horse, Babieça, and placed him at the head of the troops.

Terrible and stern he looked as he rode out against the foe, and the Moors at the first sight of his well-known figure felt a chill of dread that drove out all hope and courage from their hearts. Panic seized them, and they fled in wild disorder, seeing always that pale rider behind them, wielding his death-dealing sword. Death was indeed behind them, for the Spaniards, inspired by the dying words of their leader, pursued the foe with fierce determination, and there was a great slaughter.

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When the battle was over the warriors led Babieça, still with his grim burden, back to Castile. The wife and daughters of the Cid came out to meet him, and could scarce believe him dead ; for as he now rode in on his horse so had they seen him ride in many times before after a great victory.

The body of the dead leader was taken to the church of San Pedro de Cardena, and placed in a chair of state, and there for ten years it remained, held in the greatest reverence by all the people. At the end of ten years it was buried, and a costly tomb raised over it ; and on the tomb the effigy of the old, white-bearded warrior and that of his faithful wife Ximena lay side by side.

CHAPTER IX

HEREWARD

HEREWARD is, as we all know, a real historical character, and his holding of the Isle of Ely against William the Conqueror an historical fact. His story has doubtless been altered and added to as the years have gone by, but Hereward has always remained the typical Englishman of those early days—fearless, stubborn, reckless, loving his country and hating the foreigner, setting his face against all that was new and strange.

At the time of the Conquest the Saxons had changed since the days when Beowulf was their ideal hero. They had become prosperous and for generations had lived easily on their broad, rich lands with only as much fighting as had served to keep them still soldiers by instinct and breeding, with a keen delight in giving and taking hard blows. Their spirits were higher, and their outlook on life less gloomy; and, though they had still not much humour, they could relish a rough joke and enjoy a boisterous frolic. Yet their chief characteristic was a sturdy, solid, confident strength which was not afraid to undertake any adventure, however desperate, and having undertaken it, would not give way while life lasted.

It was to men of this character that Hereward appealed as the ideal hero, and, reading his story as it has come down to us, we learn much of what the Englishman was like when William the Norman reigned over him.

OUTSIDE the great hall of King Edward the Confessor's palace of Westminster, on a May morning of the year 1054, there was gathered a crowd of the King's subjects waiting their turn to be called into his presence. Many of them were

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ecclesiastics, for King Edward loved the Church and was always ready to listen to the petitions of monk or priest ; many were Normans, for next to monks and priests the King loved the Normans, among whom he had been brought up. There were few of the native Saxons ; this Normanized Court was not to the liking of the sturdy earls who looked with scorn on the new-fangled ways of the foreigner. But here and there you saw them—fair-haired, bearded giants wearing the long, flowing tunic which, in his turn, the trim, close-cropped, shaven Norman in his doublet and short mantle regarded with disdainful amusement as a relic of a barbarous age.

This morning, as the throng gossiped and whispered, and eyed one another with curiosity or suspicion, there arose a stir among the crowd of beggars and humbler petitioners that almost blocked the stairway. They heard the measured tread of heavy feet and the jangle of weapons ; and then the great Earl Leofric of Mercia, followed by twenty stout retainers, men of mixed Saxon and Danish race from the Fen country round about Lincoln, came striding toward the door of the hall. Men made way for him readily, for here was the third, perhaps even the second, greatest man in the kingdom, of whom even pampered Normans must be wary.

Lagging at the end of the train came, with a half-ashamed face, half-braggart strut, a golden-haired boy of about seventeen. The great Earl summoned the keeper of the hall door, and, after a few words had been spoken, was admitted with his retainers. All the attention of the onlookers was now given to the boy, who remained outside. He walked to and fro, looking like a spoilt child, who with much defiance and a little fear is awaiting judgment from his elders, though he tried hard to put on the air of a man meeting an adventure with swaggering recklessness.

He was a man in stature, for, though he was not as tall as most of the Saxons, he had enormous breadth of chest, and powerful, though fine and shapely, limbs. But his face was a boy's face. Usually its expression was open and joyous, but just now, in spite of all his efforts to look easy and untroubled,

Hereward

there was a cloud of sulkiness spoiling it. Those who did not know the boy looked at him curiously and intently, trying to find out what it was about his face that made it different from other beautiful faces they had seen; and if they were near enough they discovered it was that one of his eyes was grey and the other blue.

But most of that courtly crowd knew the boy as Hereward, the roystering, wilful, unmanageable son of the grave Earl Leofric and the saintly Lady Godiva. Normans and monks alike looked at him sourly and haughtily, for this youngster had not hidden his scorn for the "Norman puppies" and "holy crows," nor even for the "miracle-monger," as he had been heard to call the saintly King Edward. They whispered to one another, telling of rumours that had reached the Court of the latest and most outrageous escapade of this terrible boy. It was said that he and the band of high-born, mad-brained youths that he had gathered round him in his native Fen country had waylaid and robbed a priest, thrown him down in the mud, and with loud laughter had ridden off, one of them on the priest's horse, while they shouted back jeers and unseemly names at him. His saintly mother and his stern father had felt they could bear no more, and Earl Leofric, it was said, was even now petitioning the King for a decree of outlawry against their wild and godless son.

Hereward knew what they were whispering, and he held his head high, and scowled on them openly and fearlessly. He had not been able to help showing signs of shame and discomfort under the stern look and grave rebuke of his noble father, but for these men he cared nothing. They hated him and he hated them—men who were despoiling and weakening fair England by taking advantage of the prejudice and superstition of a weak King. Hereward was ready to meet any of them and make good in fair fight the words he had spoken.

The summons came for him to enter the great hall, and he went with a fast-beating heart, but with a swaggering air and bold eyes. There sat the King in the midst of his councillors. There were many nobles and abbots, both Saxon and Norman.

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There was Leofric, standing grief-stricken but steadfast, demanding punishment for his offending son.

Now that the moment had come for him to receive judgment Hereward stood proudly and lost his shamefaced look. His eyes met his father's stern gaze calmly, and he listened quietly while the sentence of outlawry was pronounced. Then he said :

" Father, I thank you. You have set me free for the life I have longed for, the only life fit for a brave fighting man, the life of the old Vikings, our forefathers. I hate the peace of your law-abiding little England. I will go where a great name and fortune can be won by the sword."

Leofric looked sadly on the defiant boy.

" And where will you go to find this fame and fortune ? " he asked.

" I will go everywhere ! " shouted Hereward, his spirits rising higher and higher as the new life opened out before his vision. " I will wander all over the world, and wherever there is brave fighting going on I will be there. I will see monsters and marvels and find adventure in many lands. I will prove my courage and my hardihood, and make the name of Hereward famous. Who would stay tamely in England when such a life as this can be had at the price of an outlaw's sentence ? Father, farewell ! Farewell, reverend King ! It will be long ere you see me again. Pray that you may not need my strong arm while I am far from you."

He turned and walked quickly, almost gaily, from the hall. His compunction was gone in the excitement of the glorious picture he had made for himself of the life he was going to lead. Outlawry seemed to him now the best thing that could happen to a youth who was in love with adventure.

He mounted his horse and rode gaily out toward the wonderful things that were waiting for him. One man alone followed him into exile, and that was a certain Martin Lightfoot, a vagrant man to whom Earl Leofric years before had given shelter and protection. The household thought him strange, even half-witted, but he was a useful fellow and could turn his hand to anything, so by degrees he had won his place, and lived



HEREWARD AND MARTIN
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HEREWARD AND THE CORNISH PRINCESS

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peaceably among the others with little notice from anybody. While Hereward was a child Martin had attached himself to him, and the two had spent hours together, while Martin told wonderful tales of giants and dragons, and fierce fights, and wild adventures. But since the boy had grown up he had not cared to hear Martin's stories, and had almost forgotten the queer, solitary man who had withdrawn himself when he found he was no longer wanted. He had waited with patient watchfulness till he could once more serve the lad who was the only person he loved. Now that Hereward was going into exile Martin would go too, running like a dog behind his master's horse, ready for anything that might betide.

They went first to Northumbria, for in those days the great earldoms were almost like separate kingdoms, and a writ of outlawry in Mercia would be long in taking effect in the northern part of the country, where Siward, the third in the great trio of Earls, held sway. Hereward and Martin came, after many adventures on the road, to the castle of Gilbert of Ghent, a Fleming, who had won by his sword an estate north of the Tyne in that part of the country which we now call the Lowlands of Scotland. He was rich and powerful, and kept a train of young knights and squires, mostly Normans, at his castle, where they were trained in the art of fighting and the usages of chivalry. It seemed to Hereward that he could not do better than spend some time in this place, fitting himself for knighthood. Gilbert was his godfather, and would, he knew, receive him with kindness.

The great Flemish lord was delighted that the son of so great a man as Earl Leofric should join his company. He cared little that Hereward came as an outlaw. That, if ever he succeeded to his father's earldom, could soon be put right.

So Hereward took his place in the household, and very soon became a favourite with everybody, except with those knights who were jealous of his strength and skill in fighting. The mistress of the house, Gilbert's wife, treated him as if he were her own son, and all the ladies loved him. He was so handsome and good-humoured, so merry and high-spirited, and his boyish conceit seemed a thing to laugh at, not to be angry with.

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Hereward was pleased with their notice, and quickly picked up from them the graceful observances and the language of devotion that the laws of chivalry laid down should be used to ladies. But his special friend was a little English maid of ten years old, fair-skinned and golden-haired like himself, whose name was Alfruda. For all his joy and pride in his independence and manhood he was still a boy at heart, and, after hours spent in practising knightly warfare and knightly sports, and trying to turn his tongue to the ceremonious phrases the ladies taught him, it was pleasant to romp with the little girl and talk to her confidentially of the great deeds he meant to do some day.

Hereward was getting rather impatient for that day to come. It was all very well to spend long days practising with the lance, and trying to become perfect in knightly accomplishments and graces; but in his heart Hereward did not believe he needed any such training. He thought himself quite fit already to begin the wonderful career that he had planned, and was sure he could win great glory for himself if only the chance came in his way.

But the chance was slow in coming. There was no fighting going on, and success in the lists did not count for very much in Hereward's eyes. Very soon after his arrival at the castle he had examined the wild beasts—bears, bulls, wolves, and stags—that Gilbert kept in great cages, ready to be brought out to encounter the knights on great occasions, and he had decided that there was only one who was worth fighting. This was a great white bear, an uncanny beast, about whom everybody spoke with terror and awe. It was, people whispered, partly human, of kin to Siward, the great earl. It had human intelligence and human passions and understood human speech, and it had powers of evil beyond any possessed by mortals. Its claws were of iron, and its strength was as the strength of twelve men. No one knew where it had come from, or how Gilbert had captured it, and no one had ever dared to meet the creature in fight. When Hereward begged Gilbert to let him try his strength against it everybody ridiculed the idea, and Gilbert gave a stern refusal.

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It happened one day that when Hereward and Martin Light-foot were coming home from a morning's hunting they heard a great tumult in the courtyard of the castle. Hereward galloped on ahead, leaving Martin to follow with the load of game. As he drew near he heard women's shrieks and the confused shouting of men, the barking of dogs and the trampling of frightened horses. He dashed toward the gate, and now he thought he



HERWARD'S FIGHT WITH THE BEAR

heard a piteous voice pleading, "Let me in, oh, let me in!" His horse backed from the gateway, trembling with fear, and, looking in, Hereward saw that the great white bear had broken his chain, shattered one side of his cage, and was standing in the courtyard, his white hair bristled up all over his body, his wicked eyes looking round in search of prey. At first Hereward thought that the courtyard was empty, except for two or three dogs, and a horse that lay dying under the paw of the bear; but in a moment he saw on the other side a little childish figure, a golden-haired girl, beating on the door of the ladies' bower and

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crying in wild terror, "Let me in, oh, let me in!" It was at her that the bear was looking, and it seemed to the boy that there was a fiendish gleam in its eyes as if it gloated over the thought of destroying a thing so delicate and beautiful.

Hereward slipped quickly from his horse, ran into the courtyard, and shut the gate behind him. Then he shouted loudly and dashed in between the bear and the little girl. The creature stopped in its rush, and made furiously at this new victim. The two were scarce two paces apart when it rose on its hind legs and lifted its great paw with the cruel iron claws, ready to strike.

Hereward almost gave up hope. It seemed impossible that he could do anything with this huge creature who stood higher, by head and shoulders, than himself. With desperate courage he raised his battleaxe as high as he could and smote with all his might on the head of the beast. He felt the blade sink in, but he saw nothing, for he had closed his eyes, awaiting the terrible stroke that should crush him to the earth.

To his amazement no stroke came, and after a few seconds—long seconds they seemed to him—he felt a drag upon the battleaxe which he still held firmly. He opened his eyes. The unwieldy body was leaning over to one side; another moment, and it fell with a dull thud and lay quite still upon the ground.

Hereward was so surprised that for a moment he did not move. He could not believe that his stroke, which had seemed to him so feeble and ineffective, had killed that terrible monster. At last, very cautiously, he went up to it. It was dead, with his battleaxe firmly fixed in its skull.

He was so lost in wonder at the deed he had done he scarcely noticed that Martin Lightfoot stood beside him, and that little Alfruda held his arm and was laughing and crying together in her relief and joy, and thanking and praising him in excited words. But in a few moments his senses seemed to come back to him, and a great rush of pride made him raise his head and look with shining eyes at the little girl whose hands were clasping his arm.

"They locked me out," cried the child; "we were all in the

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courtyard, and suddenly we heard a great crash, and the bear came out of his cage right in the midst of us. The knights and ladies rushed to the nearest door, but I could not run as fast as they, and when I got there the door was shut and they would not open it. If it had not been for you the bear would have eaten me. Oh, I love you, Hereward; you are brave, not like those cowards yonder."

"Cowards indeed!" cried Hereward, pride in the deed he had done making him more than ever scornful of these Normans, whom he had always looked upon as little more than toy fighting men. "Now listen to me, Alfruda. We will play a trick on them. Martin, help me to raise this beast. We will prop him up by the wall just outside the door and see what happens."

They hoisted the huge creature up and managed to set it by the wall. Then they waited. The noise inside the ladies' bower had died away now, and it seemed as if those within listened and wondered. Some time passed; then someone opened the door, very slowly and cautiously. A knight's head looked out. But in a moment it was drawn hastily back. The door was slammed, and the hubbub rose louder than ever.

The three outside laughed till they could laugh no more. Hereward's spirits rose to wildness.

"Help me now again, Martin," he cried. They grasped the body of the bear and flung it against the door of the bower; then shouted with delight at the shrieks and sobs, in which the men's voices were as loud as the women's, which followed. Then Hereward cried out:

"Valiant knights, all is safe, the bear is dead. Open the door, and you shall see that what affrighted you is but his lifeless body."

For a long time those inside would not believe him, but at last they ventured out; and then there was as much clamour of rejoicing and wonder and praise from the ladies as there had been before clamour of fear. As to the knights, they stood apart and talked darkly to one another. "It is not to be borne," said one, "that a stripling of seventeen should triumph over us

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in this manner." "If this goes on," said another, "Gilbert's castle will see me no longer. I will not stay to be scorned by this English clown." "We must see that his pride has a fall," said a third.

In the days that followed their jealousy of Hereward grew ever more bitter. Nothing was talked of in the castle but his marvellous deed. The ladies could not say enough in his favour. Gilbert's wife openly wished that the boy was her own son. When Gilbert returned the tale was told to him, and he offered Hereward knighthood as a reward for his deed. But Hereward said he hoped to claim knighthood for some more worthy achievement than the killing of a bear, and this saying seemed to the knights so plain a reflection on their own cowardice that they hated him more than ever.

Their jealousy grew until at last they plotted to kill him while he was out hunting, and they would most likely have done so had not the watchful Martin found out the plan and warned his master. It ended in Hereward killing two of the knights instead of the knights killing him, but he felt that he could stay no longer at Gilbert's castle. Moreover, he was getting weary of the place, and longing to set out once more on his adventures.

So he said good-bye to his kind friends at the castle, who wept and entreated him to return. Little Alfruda was broken-hearted, and Hereward promised that he would never forget her and would try to come and see her again. Then he and Martin rode off, to the great joy of the jealous knights they left behind.

The next few years were years such as Hereward had dreamed of, crammed with adventure and danger and wandering. He went to Cornwall, and there killed a hideous giant who wished to marry a Cornish princess against her will. He went to Ireland to find the princess's betrothed, brought him to Cornwall, and helped him to run off with his lady. He fought under Ranald, King of Waterford, and helped him to harry the land of his enemies. Then a great home-sickness came upon him; he begged two ships from Ranald and set sail for England, but was wrecked off the coast of Flanders, and took service under Baldwin, its Marquis.

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He married Torfrida, the fairest and richest damsel in the Marquis's capital of St Omer. Torfrida was not golden-haired, like Alftruda, but had black hair, dark blue eyes, and a fine stately figure. She was a very learned maiden, and was even said to know something of the black arts ; but if she did she never used her knowledge for any evil purpose, but was tender-hearted, and wise, and loyal in all her dealings. She taught Hereward more of true honour and knightly faith than he could ever have learned at the Court of Edward the Confessor or of Gilbert of Ghent. She turned him from a headstrong, hard-hitting, vainglorious fighter into a valiant knight who understood what was required of him by true courtesy and honour. He did not lose his conceit, and was sometimes betrayed into his old trick of boasting, but he gained some command over his temper and his tongue, and when he did offend he had the grace to be heartily ashamed.

The years went on, and at last there came to Flanders the news that Edward the Confessor was dead, and that Harold, son of Godwin, reigned in his place. With the news came a letter from Harold, inviting Hereward to come to England and take possession of the lands of his father, Leofric, who was now dead. But Hereward answered it haughtily, refusing to accept a favour from the hands of his hereditary foe.

Next came the news that William of Normandy had defeated the English at the battle of Hastings, and that Harold had fallen. Then came two years of restlessness and impatience for Hereward ; for though he declared that he was an outlaw and the affairs of England were nothing to him, yet a mighty wrath rose hotly within him when he heard how the Normans were conquering and plundering in his native country, and how William the Norman had been crowned King of England. Hereward loved his country dearly, though he tried hard to make himself believe that he did not, and he grew moody and silent as the months passed, and the news he was longing to hear—that the English had risen and driven out the invader—did not come. Many tales from England reached him in his Flemish home. He heard how the lands of the Saxon earls

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were being taken from them and given to Normans, how everywhere the people were oppressed and everywhere there was bloodshed and misery, and gradually a great plan formed itself in his mind.

One day he called Martin Lightfoot, who, through all the years that had passed, had served and watched over him.

"Martin," he said, "to-morrow you and I start for England, to spy out the land, and if we find our countrymen ready to strike a blow for their freedom we will help them. You shall have your fill of fighting, Martin, if we take a hand in this."

Martin showed no surprise at this proposal, for he had guessed something of what was going on in his master's mind.

"Fighting is good," he said; "man was born to fight. I will see that the longship is ready."

Hereward told no one but Torfrida of what he was going to do, for he meant to be back in a few weeks when he had learned what he wanted to know of the state of things in England. He and Martin landed at Boston, and rode through the familiar Fen country toward Leofric's house at Bourne.

It was late summer, and in the fields the farmers and their men were busy getting in the crops. In one field Hereward saw a group that he knew. He rode toward them, but they kept the gate against him, thinking him an enemy, and one of them, who had been Hereward's closest companion in the wild days when they both were boys, threatened him with an axe.

"What then, my old comrade," he cried, "do you not remember Hereward, who robbed a priest, and was made a wolf's head for it?"

There was a shout from all the group. "Hereward it is!" they cried. "Hereward has come again and Martin Lightfoot with him."

They gathered round him in an eager crowd. Friendly hands pulled him from his horse and clapped him soundly on the back; while voices, speaking his native tongue with the Danish tang in it that he loved to hear, asked him where he had been and what he had been doing all these years. Hereward answered

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them heartily, but was too anxious for news to talk much about himself.

"What about Bourne?" he asked. "Where are my mother and my brothers?"

The faces of his friends grew stern and wrathful. "The Norman William has given Bourne to a stranger," one of them replied, "a man of low birth, a cook, some say, who pleased the invader in cooking the supper. The lady Godiva is there still. Your young brother they murdered, but not before he had killed two of them because they insulted his mother. They cut off his head, and you may see it now on the spike of the gable above the hall."

Then Hereward swore a great oath that he would neither eat bread nor drink water while there was one Norman left in Bourne. Until darkness came on he hid himself in the house of one of his old friends, and then he and Martin—for he would not let any of the others come with him, though he could scarce keep them back—went out under cover of the night. They waded the ditch and climbed the palisade, and Hereward stood once more before the house where he was born.

They found a ladder and set it up against the side of the hall, and very tenderly and reverently they took down the boyish head with its long fair curls that the murderers had set high upon the gable. Then they looked through one of the windows, and saw inside a company of low-born Frenchmen and Flemings drinking, singing, and shouting in drunken merriment. They stole round to the door of the hall; Martin stood outside while Hereward rushed in shouting, "A Wake! A Wake!"

The drunken revellers were taken completely by surprise. They had laid aside their arms, and now they fought with the wine-cups from which they had been drinking, with pieces torn from the benches, with anything they could lay their hands on in those first moments of terror. But they were no match for Hereward, whose strength seemed doubled by the cold fury which possessed him. Those who tried to flee by the door were killed by Martin; and when the grim fight ended there was

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not one Frenchman left alive in Bourne, and the heads of fifteen men looked down horribly from its gables.

Then Hereward sought his mother, and found her in the ladies' bower with her women. They had looked on the fight with shuddering terror from the gallery above the hall, and now they turned their white faces toward the victor, half in welcome and half in fear. Hereward went quickly and stood before his



"NOT A FRENCHMAN LEFT IN BOURNE"

mother, and Godiva lifted up her face and looked upon her son. The wonderful beauty for which she had been famous was worn and faded now, but she was still fair—fairer than ever to Hereward, for there was love and pride and welcome in her eyes instead of the grief and condemnation which he had been used to see there. Now she felt that this son whom she and her husband had driven away was her only comfort and her only hope in a world full of grief and terror.

Next day Hereward, with a band of his old companions, took

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his mother and her women to the Abbey of Crowland and left them under the protection of the monks. Before he went he gathered together the people of Bourne and told them that he must return once more to Flanders to gather men who would help in the fight against the Norman, but he would return and lead them if they would follow him faithfully.

"You are our lord," they shouted; "we will follow if you lead." So the arrow was sent round from man to man all through the Fen country, and the people prepared themselves for a last desperate struggle against the foreigner.

At Crowland the body of Hereward's brother was buried with solemn observances. Then Hereward with two of his friends went on to Peterborough, where his uncle Brand was abbot. A very old man was Abbot Brand, but he remembered the boy whom he had loved and upheld in the days when both father and mother had turned from him. His dim old eyes brightened, and he fell on the youth's neck weeping, and Hereward, bold and war-hardened as he was, wept too. The two talked eagerly of deeds that had been done by the outlaw and deeds that must yet be done if England were to be saved from her foes.

"Uncle," said Hereward, "you must do something for my friends and me before we go. You must make us knights. Many a time I might have received knighthood in Flanders, but I would not, till I should be in my own country once more."

That night the three watched in the church, and Hereward prayed that his old pride and vanity might pass from him, and that he might come to the task he had set himself without hatred or malice or selfish desire for glory, but for pure love of his country and his God.

Next morning when High Mass was said in the church the three comrades walked up to the altar and laid on it their belts and swords. Then they knelt down at the foot of the altar steps, and Abbot Brand laid upon each man's bare neck his bare blade, and bade him take his sword again in the name of God and use it like a true knight for a terror and punishment to evildoers, and a defence for widows, orphans, the poor, and the oppressed.

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So Hereward was made a knight, and a few days later he went back to Flanders.

Of all that followed in the next two years there is no space here to tell fully. Sweyn, King of Denmark, sent over a force to help the English under his brother Asbiorn. Sweyn claimed the throne of England, and Hereward supported his claim, for he was a Dane himself, and held the descendants of Canute to be the rightful rulers of the land. So he, with the forty men he had gathered in Flanders, sailed with Asbiorn, and Torfrida and their little daughter came too.

But Asbiorn was a worthless leader, vain and without wisdom—too obstinate to take advice from those who knew the land better than he did. He wasted time in fruitless attempts on Dover and the south, instead of going at once to the Fen country, where the cause of the Danes was strong. At last Hereward, seeing that each day made their cause more hopeless, proposed that he should go with his men to rouse the Fen lands and meet Asbiorn, who was determined to attack Norwich, later on. So it was agreed, and Hereward and his small force sailed in their two longboats round the coast of Norfolk to the Wash, and landed in a mud creek. All round lay dreary flats over which the north-east wind blew biting. Torfrida shuddered, and thought of the bright country of Provence where she had been born, and where life was not hard and dangerous as it was here, but full of warmth and ease. But she was a brave woman, and she loved Hereward and meant to help him. So she put aside her weakness and took her place as the queen and also the servant of the little band.

They came to Bourne and found it empty, and the land around quiet and unmolested, such terror had the deeds of the Wake put into the Frenchman. For a time they lived there quietly, and Hereward formed the men of the country into a fighting force and taught them something of the art of war. Weeks went by, and then came news that Asbiorn had been defeated at Norwich and driven out to sea. His ships had sailed northward for the Humber.

Now what was Hereward to do? He was in the midst of

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enemies without means of defending himself if they came against him in force, and with no hope of help. The winter that year was long and terrible, and the news that came, through fugitives and through spies sent out by Hereward, was such as to chill all but the bravest hearts. One day Morcar, Earl of Northumberland, came fleeing to Bourne to join them, bringing news from Mercia that all there was lost, and soon after Edwin, his brother, came from the Welsh border with the same tale. All over England William was stamping out rebellion with revenges and cruelties that made men shudder. The whole country, which a few months before had seemed to be in revolt against him, was lying at his mercy, save only this handful of men in the Fens, and what could they do? Their turn would doubtless come next, and Hereward saw in his dreams the terrible William marching on Bourne, saw the house in flames, his men massacred, his wife and daughter at the mercy of the tyrant. But he was not to be cowed by dreams and visions, and in his waking moments he thought intently as to how he could save his little band from the doom that would surely fall on them if they stayed at Bourne. And at last he thought of Ely. At Ely it might be possible for a small band to defend themselves against a great force; there he might hope to hold out until Sweyn could send him help.

But before he had made the move to Ely Sweyn came with a great fleet round the coast of Norfolk into the Wash, and his men swarmed over the land. Hereward hurried with his little company to meet him, and he and Sweyn together planned a great attack on Peterborough Minster. This was done partly because, Abbot Brand being dead, the King had made Thorold, a Frenchman, abbot in his place, and partly because the Danes would go no further in helping the English without some plunder to reward them. The tale of the attack is vividly told by the Saxon chronicle.

“Early in the morning came all the outlaws with many ships, resolving to enter the minster; but the monks withstood, so that they could not come in. Then they laid on fire and burned all the houses of the monks, and all the town, except one house.

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Then came they in through fire at the Bull-hithe gate, where the monks met them and besought peace of them. But they regarded nothing. They went into the minster, climbed up to the Holy Rood, took away the diadem from our Lord's head, all of pure gold, and seized the bracket that was underneath His feet which was all of red gold. They climbed up to the steeple, brought down the table that was hid there, which was all of gold and silver, seized two golden shrines and nine of silver, took away fifteen large crucifixes of gold and of silver, and so many treasures in money, in raiment and in books as no man could tell another, and said that they did it from their attachment to the minster. Afterwards they went to their ships, proceeded to Ely, and deposited there all the treasure."

At Ely a council was held. In the great hall were gathered the abbot with his bishops and monks, Sweyn and his Danish nobles, Hereward and his men, Edwin and Morcar. What was to be done? Could they wrest England out of the hand of the Conqueror? Was there any hope that Sweyn might yet sit upon the English throne?

The Danes thought there was not; and after a stormy debate decided that they would return to their own country. Hereward and his little band were left alone in the Isle of Ely.

The Isle of Ely was an irregularly shaped piece of land measuring nearly twenty miles at its longest and twelve at its broadest part. It was surrounded by branches of several rivers—the Ouse, the Nen, and the Welney—and by great ditches known as dykes. Their waters spread over the land forming innumerable channels, meres, ditches, fens and bogs, so that the Isle of Ely was separated from the surrounding country not only by streams of water, but also by a wide-spreading expanse of mud and marsh through which only those who knew the place very well could find a path from one firm spot to another, or a waterway for a boat through the labyrinth of green, treacherous islets. From a little distance the island looked very beautiful with its brilliant verdure, the grey tower of the cathedral showing between the bright branches of the trees. The rivers and pools were full of fish, and every islet swarmed with waterfowl;

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there were stretches of rich pasture land where fine herds fed, and the ploughed land was as fruitful as any in England. In summer it was a goodly place; but when summer was gone there were cutting north-east winds and dreary fogs and the damp, deadly cold that creeps into men's bones.

But it was June when Hereward and his men settled down to make their Camp of Refuge in the island; and with the bright sun shining on them they did not trouble to think of what the winter might bring. A more deadly foe was closer at hand. William, having heard that the Danes had sailed away to their own country, was coming with a great force to crush this handful of impudent rebels who were daring to hold Ely against him.

He came in the fine summer weather and rode round the island, seeking the best point of attack; and at last made up his mind to advance from the south where, as it seemed to him, there were no difficulties that could not be overcome. But those who knew the country told him that at least half a mile of impassable bog and fen lay between the firm land on this side and on that. How could that half-mile be crossed? William believed that by thought and labour, and by spending freely both gold and human life it might be done.

He set his army of men to work. They spread themselves over the hills, cutting down trees, and bringing them, trunks and branches and all, with bundles of brushwood and turf, and casting them down into the miry depths of the bog. So they made a path for a little way, until they came to the spreading waters of the Ouse; and then they made a floating bridge, with timber and cattle hides, and a floating 'sow' or shed, which they pushed in front of them as they worked, that it might protect them from the attacks of the enemy.

After days of labour all was ready, the bridge made, the sow pushed in firmly among the reeds on the other side. William looked at the thousands who stood arrayed behind him ready for the attack, and then at the small band of tiny figures, standing by the little fort they had built of turf and timber, on the island. His heart swelled proudly. In a few hours the conquest

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of England would be complete, and the arch-rebel Hereward would be either dead or a prisoner. He turned to his army and gave the word of command.

Eagerly the men went forward. They had been told that in this well-guarded island were stored treasures greater than any the greedy Normans had found in the rich abbeys that they had already plundered, and each man was burning for his share



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BRIDGE

of the spoil. Down the narrow causeway they hurried, so eager that those behind pressed upon their neighbours in front until order was lost, and the great host came on in a confused, struggling mass. The unstable causeway sank, until the men were ankle deep in water; the bridge swayed dangerously. Yet they came on, crowding and pushing so that there was no possibility of turning or retreat. So great was the press that men fell from the causeway and sank in the bog.

On the other side stood the little band of Saxons. The men

Hereward

were eager to attack the end of the bridge and the great sow, but Hereward bade them wait.

"No need for us to fight," he said, "the Frenchmen will be their own destroyers. We will not put out a hand to stop their coming. Let them come in thousands, tens of thousands, if they like. Each one will make our victory the greater."

So they stood and watched how the causeway sank lower and the water rose higher, and how the bridge swayed and the huge sow tottered. Norman soldiers were climbing all over it now, climbing upon the roof ready to put up scaling ladders against the enemy's fort.

"Come quickly, Frenchmen," called Hereward, "make haste to land, or you will not land at all. Where are your horses? Forward, brave knights, to the attack!"

The Normans heard, but they had no answer to make, for they saw now what Hereward had seen long since—the destruction that awaited them. Slowly the great sow bent over. It was slipping down the bank toward the horrible, miry depths of the bog; men, shrieking, and clinging wildly to its sides, were being pushed down into the black slime below. More men still were coming on; the press on the bridge was so great that they needs must come.

And now the great sow had slipped so far back that there was a great gap, where the black slime had oozed up, between the end of the bridge and the land; and the front ranks of Normans, as they were pressed forward, fell into it, and there was a shrieking, struggling mass that tried wildly to find firm footing, and could not.

So the great destruction went on. No blow had been struck by the Saxon, yet hundreds of the enemy were perishing. And soon the slaughter became a slaughter of thousands; for the other end of the bridge—that nearest the farther shore, where William stood watching, rage and despair in his heart—broke away, and with a great lurch the whole structure turned over, throwing the masses that were crowded upon it into the foul depths beneath.

The first attempt of the Normans had failed; they withdrew from their camp, and for a time the English were left undisturbed.

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It was an anxious time for Hereward, for, shut up in the island, he did not know what William might be plotting against him, and feared that the wily Norman might take him at a disadvantage. So he determined, though all his men and Torfrida herself pleaded with him not to adventure his life so madly, to go among the enemy and see if he could discover what was to be the next move in the game of war that was being played between them. The story of how he did so was for generations a favourite story among the English; the minstrels made a ballad of it, which was sung to applauding audiences in every village and town. Told briefly, this is the story of Hereward's wild adventure:

He cut his hair and his beard, and put on the clothes of a wandering vagabond. Then he took his Mare Swallow, that he had brought over from Flanders. Swallow was the ugliest and the swiftest mare in the country. She looked a clumsy, chuckle-headed, ambling brute, on which a countryman might go plodding over his few acres of farmland, but when she stretched out her great legs, and put her ugly head forward, she could cover the ground at a rate which no horse had yet been found to equal.

They looked a sorry couple as they landed from the barge which had brought them from the island, but Hereward was in the highest spirits. This was the kind of adventure that he loved.

Before he had gone far he met a potter.

"Halt, there!" he cried, "give me those pots that are upon your horse's back."

"You must fight me for them, then," said the potter; and Hereward, nothing loth, jumped down, wrenched the staff from the man's hand, and knocked him down with it. Then he took the pots, gave the man a silver penny in exchange, and rode on through the next village, crying, "Pots, pots, good pots and pans!"

But when he had passed the village he slapped the sides of Mare Swallow, and away they went in a mad race over the heath. Up and down went the pots, and *crack! crack!* was heard as first one and then another got a hard knock in that rough jangle. Little cared Hereward. When he came near the other side of the heath he threw away the broken pieces, and with the few

Hereward

whole pots that were left he went on, crying out, "Pots, pots, good pots and pans!"

Soon he drew near to the town of Brandon, where William kept his Court. There was the great castle he had built, with the workmen still at work in the courtyard, and all manner of grooms and serving-men moving briskly about, wagons unloading, and horses being brought to the gates. There were soldiers in the courtyard, and soldiers keeping guard on the walls.

By this time dusk was coming on. "I must find a lodging for the night," thought Hereward, "and in the morning I will pay the Norman a visit in his castle."

He turned Mare Swallow's head, and they left the town. Outside he found a wretched hut that looked as if it might serve his purpose. He knocked at the door.

"What do you want?" cried a voice, and the head of an ugly old woman looked out.

"Pots, pots, good pots and pans!" called out Hereward. The ugly, witch-like old woman snarled at him and told him to go away; but Hereward, who believed devoutly in witches, thought that if he could only get inside the cottage he might find out something that he wanted to know through the old creature's magic arts. So he persisted, and at last she let him in, and told him to lie down on a heap of rushes in her miserable hovel. She gave his horse shelter in the turf shed outside, and in return he agreed to give her two jars and a pannikin.

Hereward lay down and pretended to fall asleep, snoring as naturally as he could. He managed to take a look round the hut, and saw all the usual stock-in-trade of the witch—bundles of herbs, candles, and in the corner a dried human hand.

Presently a second old woman, as ugly and as withered as the first, came in, and the two began to talk together about a plan that was afoot for taking Ely. Hereward almost chuckled aloud to think how chance had led him to the very place where he could find out what he had ventured from his stronghold to seek, and he listened with all his ears. He learnt that another causeway was to be made, bigger and stronger than the first, with a tower on it, where the witch could stand to curse the

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English. The attack was to be made on the ninth day from that time.

All this Hereward made out from the talk of the two crones, who mumbled and screamed and quarrelled with each other over two links of a gold chain that had been given to one of them in earnest of payment. Hereward was seriously disturbed. He believed devoutly in the power of witches, as, it was clear.



HEREWARD IN THE WITCH'S HUT

did William the Norman, or at least some one of his commanders who stood high in power; and he felt that Ely was in more danger from the curses of the witch than from the generalship of the great William. However, his fear did not take away his courage or drive him back to Ely. When the day dawned, and the old woman came shouting and snarling at him, bidding him get up, since he had had the lodging he had paid for, he went out gaily, loaded up Mare Swallow with the rest of his pots, and made for the court of the castle.

He was allowed to bring his wares into the kitchen, and was

Hereward

bargaining with the servants, when one of the nobles of William's train happened to come in.

"You are very like the Saxon Hereward," he said, suspiciously.

Hereward put on a clownish, puzzled air, and let his jaw drop, as if he had not understood what had been said.

The servants crowded round, and men came in from outside, all staring at the ragged fellow who was like the famous Englishman, the thorn in their great master's side.

Here was the adventure he had sought, and the danger, too, in fuller measure than he liked, when he thought of Torfrida and his faithful men awaiting him at Ely. But in spite of everything he could not help enjoying this great moment. He felt again like the boy Hereward who had exulted in mad and reckless escapades.

He stood in the Norman kitchen, with shoulders bowed and knees bent, looking as heavy, lumpish, and stupid as a low-born English vagabond ought to look. Several of the nobles came to look at him, but they laughed at the idea of this clownish beggar being the foe they dreaded.

"Give him a meal, some of you," said one of the nobles scornfully, "and send the clown about his business."

So Hereward was supplied with food and drink, and here ill-luck overtook him. What with the wine and the taunts that the Normans showered upon him, he lost his temper, and there was a hot quarrel. One of the servants was soon lying on the floor, felled by a blow from Hereward's fist. A great uproar arose, and he defended himself manfully; there were several more Normans lying on the floor before he was overpowered.

"Bring him before the Duke," was the cry; and Hereward, suddenly sobered, called all his wits to aid him. He was to meet the man he had longed to meet, though in a way he had not expected.

William looked on him sternly, and Hereward recognized at once that this foe of his was in truth a great man. A chill misgiving came to him that in the end the Norman would conquer. But the end had not come yet.

The kitchen men told their story, and William burst out at

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them in anger, for here was one of the brawls between Normans and English which he was anxious to prevent. He bade Hereward tell his tale, which Hereward did, truthfully and exactly. Fortunately for him, William believed him, and swore roundly at his own men for causing the quarrel. So far the interview had gone well, but now came a hitch. William's keen eye saw that the potter understood the words he had spoken to his Norman servants.

"What then, you can speak French?" he cried.

"Only a few words, your mightiness, that I have picked up wandering through the country," replied Hereward in the most atrocious French he could manage.

William still looked at him very thoughtfully, at the scars which he bore, and the patterns tattooed on his arms and throat. He had half a suspicion that this was Hereward himself, but when he hinted that if it were so the outlaw might find forgiveness and favour and have his lands restored to him the potter pretended to be thrown into a state of abject terror.

"Let not that fiend of hell have rule over us again!" he cried; "only since he has been in the Isle of Ely have we had peace."

It ended in William ordering that the fellow should be kept safely while he was out hunting. But when he came back the potter had gone. He had been taken to an outhouse, and an attempt had been made to fasten fetters on his legs; but he had kicked over the man as he stooped to fasten them, and had cut off his head with his own sword. Then he had rushed out, leaping walls and gates, dodging and hiding, until at last he got to the place where he had left Mare Swallow. He had leapt on the horse's back and had shouted in a great voice that had sounded through the courtyard and the castle, so that grooms and serving-men, knights and squires, had come running out, "A Wake! A Wake!" Then he had struck his awkward, chuckle-headed steed on her clumsy neck, and away the two had gone.

William swore in anger, but he comforted himself by thinking that the man could not escape. Soon he would be brought

Hereward

back in captivity. And so it seemed to the knights and squires who mounted in haste and galloped after the ragged Englishman on his sorry nag.

But Hereward knew Mare Swallow, and had no fear of being overtaken. It was a glorious, headlong race. On with a great rush they went, over heath and ditch and fen, the horse with a sure instinct picking out the firm, safe path. The galloping hoofs behind sounded less and less clearly, until at last they died away. Mare Swallow had won the race.

But there was still a long way to go before Ely was reached, and the road was dangerous and beset with enemies. The direct road to the east of the island was impossible. They must ride a long way round and enter at the south.

Hereward looked back. Far in the distance he could see some tiny, moving dots that he knew were the figures of his pursuers.

"Now, Mare Swallow," he said, "you have served your master well, but this is only a beginning. Take a good breath, lass, and off we go."

Off they went again on their long ride, by Newmarket and Cambridge and through the great forest at Madingley. It was evening now, but the moon was out, and there was light enough for them to find their way—too much light, indeed, for as Hereward came near Cambridge two knights saw him from the top of a hill and galloped after him, and many others followed. But Mare Swallow served him well again, and the last the knights saw of him was a wild figure vanishing into the dark forest, rising in the stirrups and crying, "A Wake! A Wake!"

The knights followed him into the forest, but soon lost their way and gave up the pursuit. One of them who had rolled from his horse and was lying breathless on the ground saw a ragged dirty fellow who came up and asked him what was the matter.

"I seek Hereward," answered the knight, "if you know where he is tell me, and I will reward you well."

"He is here," said the ragged man quietly. "I am Hereward. Now, Sir Knight, give me your sword and take this"—he gave him the sword he had taken from his dead gaoler—"and tell William it belongs to one of his servants whom Hereward slew

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in the castle of Brandon. Tell him he and Hereward have met at last, and bid him beware of the day when they meet again."

Then he went back to Mare Swallow, and in the early morning they came to Somersham, and his men came over and ferried him across to Ely.

Hereward told Torfrida and all the leaders among his band of the attack that was to be made, and the witches who were to curse the English.

"Saints are better than witches," said Torfrida, "and we have St Etheldreda, the saint of Ely, whose holy well lies near by. Let all the women walk out barefoot to the well and ask for her protection. Her blessing will avail against the curses of those evil creatures."

So the women went to the well and prayed; and Hereward always believed that it was St Etheldreda who put into his head a plan by which he could destroy his enemies. It was such a terrible plan that when he first thought of it he shrank from the idea in horror; but it seemed as if nothing else would save them. For William was again building a causeway, much broader and stronger than the last, and he had commanded all the fishermen of the Ouse to bring their boats to help carry over materials for it. "Among whom," the old chronicler tells us, "came Hereward, in a very narrow canoe, with head and beard shaven, and worked diligently with the rest. But the sun did not set that day without mischief, for before Hereward went off he finished his work by setting the whole on fire, so that it was all burnt, and some of the French killed and drowned."

On the ninth day the attack came, with the witch on her tower shrieking out curses. First William ordered out the rough artillery of that day, and great stones and masses of iron were hurled across at the English. By Hereward's orders they stood back and sheltered themselves, and the Normans jeered at them as cowards. Then came great barges, packed full with Normans, on either side of the causeway, and then a charge of thousands of armed men rushed across.

This was the time, Hereward knew, for his great plan, and sternly he gave his orders. Little puffs of smoke began to rise

Hereward

among the reeds ; then there was a crackling noise, which grew louder and louder. The smoke thickened, and tongues of flame burst out. The great bed of dry reeds, which spread from the island right across to the mainland on either side of the causeway, was on fire.

No need to tell how the flames spread and roared and devoured all that came in their way ; how the Normans turned, and rushed in wild disorder back across the causeway, while thousands were trodden under foot and fell into the bog beneath the burning reeds ; how the great barges caught fire and burned like tar-barrels ; how the witch and her tower sank in the flames ; how William raged in helpless agony on the other side ; and how the English, awed at their terrible success, watched it all in silence.

Once more the Normans had been defeated, but Hereward knew that no victory that he might win could do more than put off the day when the Camp of Refuge must be given up. For more than a year he had held it with his handful of men against all William's forces, but he could not hold it much longer. Food supplies were failing, and all of them were in dire need of clothing and nearly all the necessaries of life. Worst of all, some of the men were growing faint-hearted, and beginning to wonder whether, after all, it would not be better to submit to William and take his offer of mercy. The abbot and monks of Ely Abbey were asking themselves the same question. Like Hereward, they saw that the time must come when William would triumph, and though they were brave men and did not fear his vengeance for themselves, they feared for their abbey, its treasures, and its broad lands.

A cloud hung over the Camp of Refuge, and work and strive as he would Hereward could not banish it. Then there came a night when Edwin and his few personal followers stole out of Ely under cover of the darkness and made for William's camp. A few days later his brother Morcar was missing also. Every morning Hereward looked round, fearing to find other gaps in the ranks of his men, but for a time no one followed the example of the two Princes. But the thought of what must come was in the minds of all, and faces were gloomy and tempers short.

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All this William knew, or guessed, and he tried by guile to enter Ely, since force had failed. He found means—what they were we do not know—to communicate with the men shut up in the island. He sent promises and threats. Those who would submit should have pardon and favour; for those who did not there would be no mercy. One man after another came secretly over to his side; and Hereward, returning with a little company from a week's foraging expedition in the remote parts of the island, found that the abbot had made submission to William, and had given up the island to him on condition that St Etheldreda's Abbey should keep its lands and its treasures, and that no dishonour should be done to it. There were Frenchmen already in the island. The approaches had been betrayed to William. The end had come.

Then Hereward gathered together the men—more than half of the entire band—who, like himself, were resolved to die rather than to submit. At first they vowed to attack the Normans and die fighting, but they thought of their wives and their children and the hopelessness of their cause, and they decided to steal away from the island, make their way to the greenwood, and live there as outlaws, trusting that some time they might have a chance of striking another blow for their country. So they took their boats, and while the town of Ely was given over to plunder and ravage, and fires were rising in many places, they sailed secretly away toward their own familiar Fen country, where they felt sure they could find a refuge.

And this is all we really know of Hereward. One old chronicler says that after two years of wandering life in the greenwood he submitted to William, received back his father's lands, and lived and died in peace. Another says that though he submitted he was always looked on with suspicion, and was murdered by three Norman nobles. But neither of these speak with authority, and we may, if we prefer, believe the tradition which says that Hereward lived and died in the greenwood, and never bowed that stubborn head of his to a conqueror; that the last of the English died as free and proud as he had lived.

CHAPTER X

ROBIN HOOD

ROBIN HOOD was the popular hero of the English people at that time in their history when their country gained the name of Merry England—not because there was less misery then than there has been at other times, but because the people lived a free, open-air life with many public festivals and merry-makings, and were much given to woodland sports and pastimes. The country was at peace, and men were learning some of the pleasures that belong to a state of comparative security. But oppression of the poor by the rich was a terrible and crying evil; the mass of the people had little share in the country's growing prosperity.

The older Norman chivalry that had maintained a measure of justice for the poor had given way to a new burgher and trading class, while the clergy had become lax and corrupt from excess of power and wealth. The influence of the Church and the authority of the nobility being thus lessened, it is not surprising that the poor should have despaired of obtaining justice, and that some men should have adopted the primitive law

That they should take who have the power,
And they shall keep who can.

In such conditions moral ideals become changed, and the Robin Hood legends represent the rough-and-ready ideas of justice which appealed to the common folk of his time.

It was natural that they should take for their hero a man of the people, like themselves, who despised the rich and powerful and defied the law which enabled the highly-placed to oppress the poor. Robin Hood had all the qualities which the Englishman of that day—and, indeed, of all days—admires. He was

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strong and brave and outspoken ; he stood for liberty, and he refused to cringe before anyone, however high his position. He loved an outdoor life, and excelled in all those exercises which an outdoor life encourages.

Never was there a more popular hero than Robin Hood. Ballads without number have been made about him, and there is probably not a man or woman or boy or girl in England who does not know many stories of the bold outlaw and his band. A few only of those stories can be given here ; there are many others equally delightful.

A HUNDRED years had passed since Hereward had left the Isle of Ely and taken to the greenwood, and still the ballads telling of his daring deeds were heard all over England. Minstrels sang them on village greens and in city streets ; fathers told them to their children on winter evenings as they sat snugly round the fire ; and boys grew up holding the outlaw's life as the freest and most desirable for a brave man. For in those days outlawry was not looked upon as a disgrace. It was regarded rather as a mark of courage and high spirits. Boys who longed for a life of adventure could find it more easily by taking to the greenwood than in any other fashion. It was so easy, too, to become an outlaw. A lad had only to shoot at one of the hundreds of the King's deer that wandered temptingly about the forest, or to offer disrespect to some self-satisfied abbot, and the thing was done. There had been many outlaws since Hereward, though not one whom the people had loved so much, or in whom they had taken so much pride.

But at this time, when a great-grandson of the Conqueror sat on the throne, a boy was growing up who was to be an even more famous outlaw than the hero of Ely, and about whom ballads were to be made which were to last eight hundred years, and how many more remains yet to be seen. This lad was Rob, the son of Hugh Fitzooth, Head Forester of Sherwood and Barnesdale Forests, which lay a little to the north-east of Bourne, Hereward's home. He was a fine, tall lad, daring and adventurous. He loved the forest, and spent most of his time roaming

Robin Hood

about in it with the bow and arrows his father had taught him to use ; and very happy he was with two play-fellows—his cousin, Will Gamewell, and Marian Fitzwalter, the only child of the Earl of Huntingdon, whose castle stood near by—who came as often as they could to join him. He grudged the time which his mother, who was of gentle birth, insisted that he should spend in lessons with her. He learned readily not only reading and writing, but gentle and honourable ways, and how to bear himself fearlessly and courteously to all, whether high or low, with whom he had to do.

His father was a yeoman and a skilled forester, kindly and honourable in his dealings, and of good report through all the countryside. It was his truth and honesty, sad to say, that made him enemies. The Sheriff of Nottingham, and the Bishop of Hereford, who were both of them greedy and tyrannical, hated him because he would not help them to extort money from the poor, and because he spoke openly against their greed and oppression. They plotted together, and when Rob was about nineteen years old they managed to get Hugh Fitzooth thrown into prison on a charge of treason, though he was as loyal a subject as any in the King's dominions. The shock of his imprisonment killed his gentle, tender-hearted wife, and he himself died of the hardships he had to suffer before the time came for him to be brought to trial.

Thus Robin was left without father or mother, and though his uncle, Squire Gamewell, took him in and treated him kindly, he was very lonely and unhappy. His cousin Will had been sent to school, and Marian had gone to the Court in London to be one of Queen Eleanor's ladies-in-waiting. Robin still spent most of his time in the forest, but, without his playfellows, it was not the happy place that it had been.

So two years passed, and then one day his uncle told him that at the Fair that was being held at Nottingham the Sheriff had proclaimed a tournament. The prize was a golden arrow, and all those who shot well were to be offered places among the King's Foresters. The news delighted Robin. Here was a chance of change and excitement, and of winning glory in his

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favourite sport; and when the morning of the tournament came he said good-bye to his kind old uncle and set off in the highest spirits.

As he went through the forest whistling a merry tune, he saw a group of men sitting under an oak-tree. On the grass beside them was a great pie and jugs of nut-brown ale, and they were laughing and shouting in rude merriment. As Robin passed one of them called after him:

"Ho, there! my little archer, go you to Nottingham Fair to shoot for the prize with your tupenny bow?"

Robin turned angrily. He knew the man; he had helped in the plot against Hugh Fitzooth, and had been given his place as Head Forester.

"My bow is as good as yours," he answered, "and I warrant my arrows will go as straight as any that you can shoot."

"Try him! Try him!" cried the men; and the leader said with a sneer, "If you hit the target I will give you twenty silver pennies, but if you fail you shall have a good drubbing for your impudence."

"Where is the target I shall shoot at," shouted Robin in a rage; and the man pointed to a flock of deer feeding about a hundred yards away.

Robin drew his bow. Straight and true the arrow went, and the leader of the herd leapt up, then sank on the grass, shot through the heart.

At once there was a great outcry. "You have killed one of the King's deer!" cried the forester, in wicked triumph, "and your head is forfeit. Make off now, and see you come not this way again."

The boy was beside himself with rage. "You tell me this!" he cried, "you who by treachery stand in my father's place!"

He turned and walked away, choking with fury. The angry forester took his bow and shot an arrow after him. Robin heard it sing close to his ear, missing his head by an hairbreadth. He could bear no more. Quick as thought he turned and sent an answering shaft. It went straight and true as the first had done. With one loud cry the forester fell dead.

Robin Hood

His terrified comrades gathered about him, for a moment forgetting Robin, and the lad made off swiftly through the forest. He knew that his deed had made him an outlaw, but he felt a stern joy in the thought that he had avenged his gallant father and his gentle mother. He did not dread a life spent in the forest. The greenwood was his home ; and now, as he walked through the forest paths, the trees seemed to hold out friendly hands to him and the leaves to murmur a welcome.

All day he wandered, and at night came to a little cottage where he had often been before with Will and Marian. He knew the old woman who lived there, for she had often given them a drink of milk and a crust of sweet, newly baked bread when they were tired and hungry with rambling in the forest. The welcome was still ready for him, and the milk and bread, and as he ate he told his kind friend of what had happened that morning.

" Evil times ! " said the old woman sadly, " evil times in this land for poor men. My three sons are all outlawed because, to save us from starvation, they killed the King's deer. They are hiding in the forest with two score others, stout bowmen like themselves."

" Tell me where they are," cried Rob, " and I will go and join them."

The old woman looked at him compassionately. " 'Tis pity such a gallant youth should come to this," she said, " but needs must. My sons will be here to-night, and you shall talk with them."

When darkness fell the widow's three sons stole to the door, and they and Rob talked long on the wrongs which had driven them to the free life of the woods. It was agreed that Rob should join their band.

" They are gallant fellows," said Will, the eldest of the brothers, " and good comrades. Yet men cannot live together without a leader. So we have made an agreement that he who dares go shoot at Nottingham and wins the golden arrow shall be our leader."

" I was on the way thither when I met with the foresters," cried Rob. " I will go and I will win. I care not for the Sheriff

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and all his men, though I know that a price has been set upon my head. Go to Nottingham Fair I will."

He set eagerly to work to plan a disguise, and his new friends helped him with right good will. They found him a soiled and ragged gown, with a hood something like a monk's. They helped him to stain his arms brown and his hair red, and when they had finished it would have been hard to recognize in the wild, ragged beggar man the comely young Rob of Locksley.

The Sheriff's men who were watching at the city gates, eager to gain the £200 reward that had been offered to any who should capture him, dead or alive, let him pass next day without doubt or question. He limped into the lists round which a great crowd had gathered—the gentry in curtained boxes that had been set up, the common folk on rough benches, or standing. Rude laughter and jeering cries greeted the halting beggar man, who looked indeed a sorry knave among that company of trim archers. There was one who was in almost as sad a plight as Robin himself, and that was a dark-faced man with a green bandage over one eye, whom the crowd at once nicknamed 'Blinder.'

Rob took no notice of the mockery and the shouts, but looked calmly under his hood at the assembly. In the chief box he saw the lean, sour-faced Sheriff, with his wife and his ill-favoured daughter, both gorgeous in jewels and fine clothes. In another box Rob saw a bright-eyed, dark-haired girl, as fair and fresh as a country lass should be. At the first glance he knew it was his old playfellow, Marian Fitzwalter. Here was another reason why he must not fail.

There were twenty competitors, and in the first round twelve, including Rob and 'Blinder,' shot their arrow into the centre. For the second round the target was placed farther back, and this time only Rob and 'Blinder' were successful. They, therefore, had to shoot for the prize. Rob's arrow went straight to the centre, 'Blinder's' came just outside. He turned to Rob and said:

"I hope some day we shall shoot together again. As for the prize, I care not for that, except that I knew the Sheriff would

Robin Hood

be wrath to give it me. Farewell." He left the lists, and in a moment was lost in the crowd outside.

The herald summoned Rob to the Sheriff's box. The great man looked at him coldly and curiously.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Men call me Rob the Stroller," was the answer.

"You shoot well," said the Sheriff, "and if you were decently clad you might make a reasonably good forester. Would you like to enter my service?"

"I am a free man, and wish to enter no man's service," replied Rob.

The Sheriff's sour face grew sourer.

"Well," he said, "you have won the prize, and it is for you to bestow it on whatever damsel you will. See that you choose worthily."

The Sheriff's daughter looked as graciously as her arrogance would allow on the beggar man, for she thought

he could do no less than bestow the arrow on her. But he took no notice of her glances nor of the nudges and meaning looks of the herald. He walked up to the other box where Marian sat with shining eyes and flushed face, for she had noted the beggar man closely, seeing in him something familiar, and as he stood before the Sheriff she had recognized him as the boy she had played with in Sherwood Forest. He laid the golden arrow down before her.

"Lady," he said, "will you let a poor wandering man, who would serve you better were it in his power, make you this small offering?"



THE ARCHERY CONTEST

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"Thank you, Rob-in-the-hood," she replied, with the quick, merry glance he knew so well. His eyes met hers, and he saw that she had recognized him. He would have liked to linger and try to speak to her when the tourney was over; but he saw the Sheriff's cold, threatening eye watching him, and he knew that it would be dangerous to stay. Swiftly he passed through the crowd and was out of the town and making for the depths



THE TREE IN WHICH ROBIN HOOD
HUNG HIS VENISON

of the forest before the men whom the Sheriff sent after him had caught a sight of his hooded, monkish head.

That night Rob joined the band of outlaws in their hiding-place, and was hailed as their leader. The news of how he had won the golden arrow had been brought by one of their band who had been present at the tourney in disguise—and this was no other than 'Blinder,' whose real name was Will Stutely. He had watched from his place among the crowd while Rob bestowed the arrow on Marian, and he greeted Rob by the name she had called him, 'Rob-in-the-hood.' Rob

was well pleased to take a name that had come from Marian, and so he became 'Robin Hood.'

Round the camp fire that night the outlaws supped together, and pledged each other in draughts of nut-brown ale. They swore to be true to the brotherhood and to help one another as loyal comrades; to take money only from the rich and the oppressor, but to help the poor and the weak; never to hurt a woman or a child; to be true to their leader, and obey him in all things. They gave him a horn whose sound they pledged themselves always to answer, and they drank to

Robin Hood

"a merry free life for all gallant outlaws in the Forest of Sherwood."

A merry life they had all through that summer, and a terrible thorn in the flesh they were to the Sheriff, who, try as he would, could never get hold of one of them. For as soon as the poor people found that these outlaws were not greedy and selfish, like their old tyrants, the Sheriff and the Bishop, but were always ready to give a helping hand to anyone in distress, they came over to their side and helped them to outwit the common enemy.

Robin was as happy as a man well could be. This free, adventurous life was the life he loved, and he had round him a band of loyal followers and comrades—fourscore of them now, for scarce a week passed without some stout fellow begging to be admitted to the brotherhood. So happily they lived, and so easy they found it to get the better of their enemies, that Robin felt the security grow tame, and he longed for a little danger to give zest to life. Since it would not come to him, he resolved to go and seek it, and one fine morning he started off for Nottingham, to see if adventure waited for him there. He would have none of his men go with him, but bade them stay within hearing of his horn; then away he went in high spirits.

After a time he turned from the road and took a short cut which led across a brook. As he drew near he saw that the stream was rushing strongly down and the rough log bridge was partly under water. With a leap he bounded over the sunken part of the bridge and landed upon that which stood high and dry above the stream; and there he came face to face with a man at least a head taller than himself who had just started to cross from the other side.

"Give way, fellow!" cried Robin, imperiously. The man smiled.

"Fair and softly," he said, "I give way only to a better man than myself."

"I will show you a better man," cried Robin, who was beginning to get angry; but the stranger only laughed again as if it were the best joke he had heard for a very long time.

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"Long have I looked for that better man," he said. "Show him to me, I pray you."

"That will I," shouted Robin, "wait only while I cut a cudgel like the one you hold in your hand."

He leapt to the bank and cut a stout oak branch six feet long, then back again he came with a bound. The stranger stood watching him with a careless, merry smile.

"Now then," cried Robin, whirling his staff above his head. "I would rather have met you with bow and arrow, but this cudgel will suffice to teach you your lesson. One, two——"

"Three!" roared out the man, and down came his great staff. Robin sprang aside, and the blow just grazed his shoulder, but it warned him that he must fight as he had never fought before if he meant to win, for the blow, had it fallen upon him, would certainly have sent him crashing to the earth.

He struck in his turn as hard as he could, but his opponent caught the stroke on his staff. Then to it they went with all their might, Robin dodging, leaping, ducking, getting a blow in here and there, the other striking such great strokes any one of which would have made an end of the fight had it fallen where it was aimed. It was a marvel that one of the two had not long ago toppled into the stream; but for some time both managed to keep their footing. At last Robin saw his chance. With a quick spring he managed to deal his opponent a mighty blow on the ribs, then he sprang back, expecting to see the great form tumble over with a terrific splash. The blow did in truth shake the big man, and for a moment it seemed as if he must go down; but he quickly recovered, and while Robin was still waiting for him to fall, *whack!* his staff had come down on the unguarded head.

Into the stream went Robin, too dazed to be quite certain what had happened; and, shouting with laughter, the stranger held out his staff and drew his drenched opponent to land. Robin's head was a hard one, and well used to knocks, and before many minutes he was almost himself again.

"You hit hard," he said ruefully; and the big man laughed again, until Robin could not help joining in.



ROBIN HOOD AND LITTLE JOHN
Henry Evison



ROBIN HOOD MEETS FRIAR TUCK

Henry Evison

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Robin Hood

"Still, I am in a pretty plight," he said. He took up his horn and sounded on it three notes; and the big man stopped laughing and stared in astonishment. From behind trees and bushes, starting up out of the ground, as it seemed, came stout fellows dressed in Lincoln green—one after another until at least two score stood around Robin.

"Why, master!" cried Will Stutely, "how come you to be drenched in this fashion?"

"This fellow and I met on the footbridge," answered Robin, "and it was cudgel against cudgel until his fell on my head, and into the stream I went."

Will strode threateningly toward the stranger, but Robin cried, "Nay, 'twas in fair fight." There was a merry gleam in his eye as he turned to the big man, who had scarce yet recovered from his astonishment.

"What think you?" he said. "Are we quits?"

"Aye, 'tis your turn now," replied the other. "You are a fine fellow, and I like you well. Pray what is your name?"

"I am called Robin Hood," was the answer.

"Oh!" said the stranger, and his face fell. "I have heard of you, and was indeed on my way to ask to be admitted into your band. 'Twas a foul chance that directed that blow on your head."

"What matters that?" cried Robin. "'Tis men who can strike hard blows that we want."

He held out his hand, and the other grasped it heartily.

"Take now the simple oath that binds us together," said Robin. "Promise to be true comrade in mind, and body, and heart, even unto death."

"I promise," replied the other.

"Now are you one of us," said the leader; "but by what name shall we call you?"

"John Little is my name," replied the new comrade.

Will Stutely's eyes twinkled. He bent down to the stream and filled a horn with water.

"Nay," he said, "I can find a better name for this infant of our band. I will stand godfather to him."

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With a quick movement he poured the water over the other's head, and cried, "I name him Little John."

There was a great roar of laughter from the band; and that night Little John supped with his new comrades under a mighty oak, and Robin, looking with pride on his great limbs and open, merry face, felt very well satisfied with his morning's work, though his head still buzzed a little from that crashing stroke.

As the days went on Robin Hood found Little John a comrade more to his mind than even the other members of his band, and the two became firm friends. One summer morning they set out together and strolled toward the footbridge where they had first made acquaintance. There by the side of the brook they flung themselves down, and, lying with their faces turned up to the blue, cloudless sky, they rejoiced that they lived in the free and open forest instead of being shut up in some stately mansion of a dusty town.

There was a sound of footsteps coming up the road, and a tuneful voice trilling so joyfully that it made one feel merry just to listen.

Robin and Little John raised their heads quickly.

"We will lie still and watch for this singing-bird," quoth Robin, "and hope that his purse is not as light as his heart."

In another minute along came a tall fellow, clad all in scarlet from top to toe. His yellow hair hung to his shoulders, and on his head he wore a fine hat with a cock's feather. He had a gaily ornamented sword by his side, but he walked with little mincing steps, and tossed his head, and looked to this side and that, more like a vain miss in her teens than a man fitted to bear weapons. Little John could scarce keep from laughing.

"A pretty youth," he said, "yet well made, and ready with his hands, I warrant me, for all his finery."

"Not he," replied Robin. "I wager my long-bow that the very sight of a raised quarter-staff would make him run and squeal. Watch now. Hide behind this bush and see what short work I will make of him."

Robin went forward and stood right in the way of the brilliant stranger. But the youth took no notice of him, nor altered in the least his leisurely going.

Robin Hood

"Hold!" quoth the outlaw.

"Wherefore should I hold, good fellow?" sweetly inquired the other, with just a glance in Robin's direction.

"Because I bid you," replied Robin. "Hand me your purse that I may see whether you have more than your share of silver pennies. For, know that it is my work to take away from those who have too much and give to those who have too little, that all may be equal."

"You are really quite amusing," said the stranger sweetly; "go on, I am in no hurry."

Robin did not like this cool treatment. He grew a little angry.

"Hand me your purse without so many words," he said, "or may be I shall ask for it in a way that will not amuse you."

"Alack!" replied the youth in scarlet, "it grieves me to refuse you, but I cannot show my purse to every vagabond upon the road, and I cannot part with my silver pennies for other men's use. So, my good friend, I will pass on."

"Not so," said Robin. "Yield now, or it will be the worse for you."

But the gay stranger seemed not to understand his threat, and, as if tired of the conference, he began his merry song once more and took a step forward. Robin thought of Little John behind the bush, and of how he must be chuckling to see his chief treated in this lordly, careless fashion. He raised his quarter-staff and spoke threateningly.

The stranger sighed. "Alack!" he said, "after all I suppose I shall have to run the fellow through. After I had determined against such doings, too." He drew his fine sword, and with another deep sigh stood on guard.

"Put away your toy sword," said Robin contemptuously, "and get a cudgel that we may fight on equal terms. There are plenty just behind you to be had for the pulling."

The stranger looked thoughtfully at Robin, then seemed to agree with what he had said. He put back his sword and walked carelessly over to a stout little sapling that grew near by. He gave it a tug, and up it came, root and all.

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Little John, watching in delight from his bush, saw the feat, and grinned broadly.

The stranger came back and stood before Robin, who was a little taken aback. But he was nothing loth to begin the fight. It was such a fight as made Little John roll over and over in delight, and vow that this was the rarest entertainment he had had for many a day. *Whack! whack!* went the stout cudgels against each other, until chips and splinters were flying all around. Backward and forward, round and round, went the two fighters, raising such a cloud of dust that Little John could scarce make out which was which, for scarlet coat and Lincoln green were alike grey. The stranger fought with the same careless ease as he talked, but for all that Robin found it a hard job to get a blow in with his cudgel. Three times he managed it, and smote stoutly, but the stranger stood firm. Then Robin got a smart knock on his knuckles, which almost made him drop his cudgel. The pain in his fingers was so great that for a moment he took his eyes off his opponent to look if they were smashed to pieces; in that moment came a mighty blow under his arm, and down he went.

He was up again in a moment, the pain forgotten in wrath. His staff was raised, when out from behind the bushes came Little John.

"Hold!" he cried.

"Ho! another!" said the stranger, not a whit put out by this sudden appearance of a second enemy. "Are there any more of you? Let them come on, and I will give them the best I can."

"Not for all the deer in Sherwood!" cried Robin, "neither I nor any of my men shall touch you more. You are a good fellow, and I would rather be your friend than your foe."

The stranger looked at him more carefully than he had done before. Robin's face was grimy with dust, his clothes torn and disordered; but in spite of these things the stranger seemed for the first time to recognize him.

"You are Robin Hood of Barnesdale, if I mistake not," he said.

Robin Hood

"You are right," answered Robin.

"And to think that I fought you, when I set out this morning to seek you for the sake of old friendship," he cried. "Why, Rob lad, know you not Will Gamewell?"

"Ho!" roared Robin, "Will Gamewell it is. You have grown a fine gentleman with your finery and your schooling, else should I have known my old friend."

The two, almost beside themselves with joy, hugged one another heartily, to the immense delight of Little John.

Then Will told how he had seen Marian, and she had shown him the golden arrow, and told him of the archer's tourney at Nottingham; and how she had sent a message to Robin that she would never forget her old playmate. He told how his father, still hale and hearty, held Robin in affectionate remembrance. And then he came to the cause that had brought him to the greenwood. In a fit of anger he had struck and killed a steward, who for a long time had cheated and tyrannized over his father, and at last had called him "a meddling old fool," not knowing that Will was within hearing.

Here, then, was another comrade. "What shall we call you?" said Robin. "Each man takes a new name when he comes to the greenwood. I have it"—he looked at the other's dusty raiment—"we will call you 'Will Scarlet.'"

Thus Robin Hood's company grew, one good man after another coming in as the fame of the outlaw's band was spread abroad. There was Friar Tuck, who lived in a hermitage near Fountains Abbey with half a hundred great dogs that he had trained to all sorts of wonderful feats. Him Robin met and fought with in the middle of a stream; and again the luck went against the outlaw chief. He slipped on a loose stone and went down under the water. The sturdy friar waited until he stood upright again, and Robin was so pleased with this fair and courteous treatment that he forthwith offered to build him a hermitage in Sherwood Forest if he would join their band; and so a jolly friar was added to the company.

Next there was Allan-a-Dale, a young minstrel whom Robin found in very mournful case, because his lady love was being

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forced by her brother to marry an old knight whom she abhorred. Robin and his men went to that wedding and carried off the bride that was to be from under the very nose of the fat Bishop of Hereford; and Friar Tuck married her to Allan-a-Dale, and both came to live in the greenwood.

The Sheriff of Nottingham grew more and more enraged as deeds like this were done almost every week, and, try as he would, he could not lay his hands on any of the offenders. He threatened and raved, offered rewards for the capture of the outlaws, made cunning plans, and laid trap after trap, thinking to catch them. But each time it turned out that he was the one who was tricked, and the jolly outlaws, having made him a laughing-stock to his own men, got safely away.



THE SHERIFF'S MEN SURPRISE THE
THREE SONS OF THE WIDOW

At length came a defeat for the Sheriff more public and more humiliating than any that had gone before it. His men managed to surprise the three sons of the old widow redhanded, shooting the King's deer, bound them, and brought them to their master. Highly delighted, the Sheriff arranged for a great public hanging in the market-place of Nottingham, and made all preparations. But Robin Hood, to whom the mother of the prisoners came beseeching him to save her sons, borrowed the dress of a palmer, and in that disguise offered his services as hangman. At the gallows foot he cut the bonds of his three followers. Then he blew his horn, and suddenly the market-place was full of men in Lincoln green.

They swarmed over the gallows and bore away the prisoners,



ROBIN HOOD AND THE SHERIFF
Otway McCannell

Robin Hood

while the Sheriff shouted wild orders to his men to shoot them down. But his men had no chance, for the crowd was on the side of Robin Hood ; and so away went the band triumphant, out of the town and up the hill and into the forest, as gay and gallant a company as you would see in the land, with the ragged palmer at their head.

The Sheriff was so angry that he felt he would give all that he possessed to get hold of this impudent outlaw who had once more made him a laughing-stock to all his people. He offered great rewards to any who would bring Robin Hood, dead or alive, to Nottingham ; and all the stoutest and hardiest fellows round about at one time or another tried their hand at the capture. But it was no good. Either they met Robin Hood and were so won over by his frank, hearty manner and the joys of the life that he and his band led in the forest that they forthwith gave up their homes and their callings and became outlaws themselves ; or else they came sadly to grief in an encounter with one or other of the band, and were either killed, or so roughly handled that they went home resolved that Robin Hood might rob all the country before they would meddle with him again. One of the most famous of all the ballads sung about Robin Hood tells how one of these men, Guy of Gisborne, came against Robin, how they fought together, and how Robin killed his opponent, dressed himself in the other's clothes, and thus disguised came to the Sheriff just in time to rescue Little John, who had fallen into his hands.

Summer was passing into autumn, when one morning Robin met in the woods a slim young page. As the boy came near to him a furious stag rushed out of the wood and charged at him ; but an arrow from Robin's bow pierced its head, and it fell, bringing the page down with it. Robin rushed to his aid, and discovered as he looked in the white, frightened face that this was no page, but his old friend Marian. Her father was dead, she told him, and Richard the Lion-heart, who had succeeded his father on the throne, was away in the Holy Land. His brother, Prince John, had seized her lands and threatened her with imprisonment ; and so she had fled to find Robin in the forest.

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Very gladly he welcomed her and took her to the wife of Allan-a-Dale, who rejoiced to have so fair a maiden for her companion. Soon Marian was on the best of terms with all the band and enjoying to the full the free forest life. To the outlaws she seemed the fairest and sweetest of maidens, and one and all were devoted to her, and looked upon 'Maid Marian,' as they called her, as their queen.

So the months went on and the fame of Robin Hood spread



THE MEETING OF ROBIN HOOD AND
MARIAN

through the land. He was the hero of the people, because in those troubled days, when might was right, he loved the common folk, whom few regarded, and used his strength against their oppressors. Anyone, in fact, who was in trouble was sure of sympathy from Robin, and another very well-known ballad tells how he helped Sir Richard of the Lea.

It was an autumn morning, and Robin had sent out three of his trusty followers—Little John, Will Scarlet, and Much, the miller's son, bidding them watch for travellers along the highroad and bring the first that seemed likely to have a well-filled purse to dine with

him at the trysting oak. The three took their stand and looked anxiously up and down the road, but for a long time no one appeared.

"Now may God send a likely traveller soon," said Little John, "for I begin to yearn for my dinner."

"'Tis hard that one's stomach must wait on the whim of a stranger," said Much. "Come he ever so slow, we may not eat till he appear."

Robin Hood

"And yonder he comes," shouted Will. There indeed in the distance was a horseman, and the three stood up, looked to their bows and fingered their cudgels. When the rider came abreast of their hiding-place they stepped out and stood before him. He looked so woebegone and dejected that they could not help pitying him, and would very likely have let him pass had not their stomachs cried out so loudly for dinner.

Little John lifted his cap and bent his knee before the stranger, and then laid hold of his horse's bridle.

"My master bids you to dine with him in the forest," said the outlaw. "He has been waiting for you these three hours."

The knight looked at him with sad eyes.

"Who is your master?" he asked.

"He is none other than Robin Hood," replied Little John.

"Needs must then," said the rider listlessly, shrugging his shoulders. "Lead on, I follow."

Off they went into the forest and soon came to the trysting oak. Robin stepped forward to bid the newcomer welcome.

"You come in good time," he said, "for the meat is even now being brought to board." So when the knight had laved his face and hands in cool water they sat down. The knight's face began to look a trifle less sad when he saw the toothsome fare—venison and roast swans and pheasants and small fowl, with cakes of various kinds and flagons of ale. As the meal went on he brightened more and more, and when it was ended he thanked Robin heartily, saying that he had enjoyed no meal so much for three weeks past.

"If you and your band pass my way," he said, "I will try to give you as good."

"That is all very well," said Robin, "but I look for some other payment than a dinner which it is likely I may never eat. I am but a yeoman and you are a knight. It is only fitting that you should pay me in gold for your meal."

The knight's face grew ashamed and troubled. "I have no gold, good Master Outlaw," he said. "All I have in my purse is not worth your acceptance."

Now Robin had heard this excuse before, and though he had

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taken a liking for his guest and believed him to be a true knight, yet it was a law in his company that words such as these should be put to the proof.

"How much have you?" he asked.

"Ten shillings," replied the knight.

"Search him, Little John," ordered Robin; and Little John, being well used to the task, searched quickly and effectively. "The knight has told the truth," he said. "He has but ten shillings."

Robin was pleased that he had not been mistaken in the knight's honour, but grieved that a man of his degree should have come to so poor a state.

"If it please you to take a loan from me," he said, "I offer it gladly. Tell me, I pray, is it by gambling, or brawling, or misfortune that you have come to this pass?"

"I have lived always a sober and quiet life," was the sorrowful answer. "My name is Sir Richard of the Lea, and my castle is a league outside the walls of Nottingham. Last year I had four hundred pounds saved, and my income each year was four hundred pounds. Now I have nothing but my wife and my children. Yet the change has not come of my own fault. I have a son, a gallant youth, who is my pride and my joy. When last year I came home from the Holy Land I found that by chance he had killed a knight in the lists at a tournament. To save him I had to mortgage my lands and my castle to the Bishop of Hereford, and he swears that if I do not repay him the four hundred pounds, with the ruinous interest that he demands he will seize my estate."

"Ha!" cried Robin, "the Bishop is an old friend of mine, and a worthy man indeed." He whispered a few words in Little John's ear. "Drink another cup to the turn of fortune that may help you. Perhaps some friend may come to your aid."

"I will drink to you, Robin," said the knight, "with thanks for your courtesy. But as for friends, I had many when I was rich, now I have none."

By this time Little John returned, with Much, both of them carrying large bags. They poured out a heap of gold before the

PATTEN WILSON.



ROBIN HOOD AND SIR RICHARD OF THE LEA

Patten Wilson



KING RICHARD AND THE OUTLAWS

Henry Evison

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Robin Hood

astonished knight and set to work to count it and put it in piles ; and when they had finished it was seen to amount to four hundred pounds.

"This will I lend you," said Robin, "and if you have no friends our Lady shall be your surety. You shall promise by our Lady to repay me twelve months from to-day when you have had time to gather the money."

The knight could scarcely speak for joy and astonishment as he tried to thank Robin for this timely and unlooked-for help.

"If I live," he said, "you will see me here on this day twelve-month, bringing the money with me. May God bless you and your band. I wonder not that the common people love you, but I warrant that not one among them has such cause to bless your name as have I, Sir Richard of the Lea."

The knight rode off with his head held high and his eyes glad, not like the distressful stranger whom Little John had brought to dinner. The next day the Bishop, who had quite made up his mind that the debt would not be paid and that the estate would fall to him, received from the knight payment in full. With a light heart Sir Richard rode home to his happy wife and children, leaving the Bishop to rage and storm as he would.

The Bishop, however, had the four hundred pounds, and he was minded to put it in safe keeping ; and so a few days afterward he set out, with ten men-at-arms, toward Nottingham. As he rode through Sherwood Forest he fell in with Robin Hood and his band. In great glee they brought him to an open space in the wood where a deer was roasting and dinner being prepared.

"You shall dine with me to-day," said Robin gaily, "it is not too often we are honoured by receiving a bishop at our board."

A merry meal it was, and the Bishop, who was hungry after his morning's adventure, ate and drank heartily, and began really to enjoy this encounter. His face beamed with the good cheer and the good jests ; but it changed sadly when the reckoning was called.

"A bishop must pay well for his dinner," quoth Robin. "Bring out your purse, my lord, and you shall have the reckoning."

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"I have but a few silver pennies," declared the Bishop, taking out a meagrely filled purse.

But Little John took no notice of the purse. He went straight to the saddle-bags and, spreading out the Bishop's cloak, he poured upon it a heap of gold. He and Much counted it.

"Four hundred pounds, master," he said.

"It belongs to the Church," protested the Bishop—"you would not rob the Church. I have no money of my own; I am a poor man."

"It is well known how poor is the Bishop of Hereford," answered Robin in scorn. "This money will do more good in my hands than in yours, therefore I take it. And now, my lord Bishop," he went on, dropping his stern tone, and casting a quick, merry glance at some of his followers, "before you go you shall join in our festival and dance to make us merry."

The Bishop protested he could not dance, but it was of no use. Allan-a-Dale began to play, and one after another of the band took the portly Bishop for a partner and forced him to caper about to the music. He looked so miserable and angry and awkward in his enforced gambols that the rest of the band rolled on the ground in helpless laughter as they watched him.

Then they set him astride his horse, with his face toward the tail, and started him off on the road to Nottingham.

From that time forward the Bishop gave nearly all his time and energy to the task of catching Robin, and by ill-luck it was not long before he and his men came upon the outlaw alone upon the high road. With shouts of triumph they dashed toward him, but Robin, quick as lightning, dodged in among the bushes by the side of the road, and though his pursuers were at his heels they could not see him. The widow's cottage was not far off, and, winding in and out, ducking and crawling, Robin managed to reach it. He put his head in at the window and told the old woman what had happened.

"Change clothes with me," she cried, and the plan pleased Robin well. Quickly the grey cloak was passed out of the window in exchange for the green mantle, then the skirt and hood and staff. Robin stood there, a poor, bent old woman;

Robin Hood

while inside, holding a bow and arrows, the widow crouched in a dark corner, Robin's cap on her head, his mantle on her thin shoulders.

Up came the Bishop and his men in hot pursuit. They saw an old woman hobbling along with the help of a stout stick, and muttering to herself as she went.

"Here, dame," cried a soldier, "have you seen Robin Hood go by this way?"

The old woman mumbled under her hood. "Robin Hood? Yes, I know him. He is good to the poor. He gives me food. The Bishop never gave me a bite or a sup. What do you want with Robin Hood?"

"Where is he?" cried the Bishop. "Tell us, or you shall be burnt as a witch."

The old woman fell on her knees, shaking and sobbing with fear. "Mercy! my lord," she cried, "Robin is in my cottage. He came but just now."

The Bishop waited to hear no more. "Break down the door!" he cried, and his fellows set to work. In a few minutes it was done.

"There he is," cried one; and there indeed, in a corner, was a form in Lincoln green. The Bishop almost danced with joy.

"Take him!" he cried. But the men had a wholesome dread of Robin Hood and hung back.

Meanwhile the hobbling old woman had straightened herself, and was running swiftly into the forest. A blast upon a horn quickly brought Little John and his comrades. In a few words Robin explained what had happened, and they all raced back to the cottage in time to see the door go down.

"What are you doing to my cottage?" called out the old woman, coming forward, bent and feeble again now. "I'll curse you for this."

The Bishop seized her roughly, but paused when he saw that a ring of men in Lincoln green, with bows bent, had silently surrounded his band. He knew what that meant. He had been tricked again.

"Seize the leader," he cried in rage, "and if one arrow is shot kill him."

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There was a harsh laugh from inside the hut, and the real old woman, throwing off the green mantle, came forward and bowed mockingly to the Bishop.

"What is your will, my lord," she said. "Surely it must be to bring me an alms you have come."

"He has brought you a goodly present in those saddle-bags," said the other old woman, coming forward. The cloak was thrown off now, and very comical the manly, laughing face of Robin looked above his woman's gear. "Take now his purse, my men—that shall be our payment."

The Bishop raged violently and vowed that none should touch purse or saddle-bags. Then Robin took his bow, and very deftly sent an arrow which carried away the prelate's hat and skull-cap. It was a forcible argument, and it convinced the Bishop. He threw down his purse and galloped off as fast as his horse would go, leaving the outlaws and the chuckling old woman in possession of the field.

It is a wonder that the Sheriff and the Bishop did not give up trying to capture the outlaws, seeing that they had been worsted in so many attempts. But they did not. They racked their brains and brought out wonderful new plans, but something always went wrong. The Sheriff proclaimed another tourney, and again the outlaws, skilfully disguised, mingled with the crowd. Robin's marvellous shooting told the Sheriff who he was, and he laid careful plans for a capture. But the band sprang to the rescue, and in the general scrimmage that followed they escaped, though Little John was so sorely wounded that Robin Hood had to carry him away on his back. Friar Tuck dressed the wound and pronounced that in two or three days the great fellow would be as well as ever; and a feast was being prepared to celebrate the victory when news came in that Will Stutely and Maid Marian were missing.

Soon they learned that Will was a prisoner, and had been sentenced to be hanged next day, but of Marian they could find out nothing.

Next day the band made their way to Nottingham. Again a palmer appeared, just before the time for the hanging, and

Robin Hood

besought leave to minister to the condemned man. This time it was such a slender, frail young palmer that the Sheriff knew that he could not be one of the brotherhood, and allowed him to make his way to the gallows.

It was not one of Robin's men, but it was Maid Marian. She had seen Will captured and had made up her mind to try to rescue him; and knowing that the others would not have allowed her to run into danger, she had hidden in the forest until the time came for action.

But after all she did little, for she had scarce begun to speak in a low voice to the prisoner when through the crowd dashed Much, the miller's son, shouting, "I pray you, Will, before you die take leave of all your friends." Then came another of those scenes to which, by this time, the Sheriff must have been growing accustomed. Will's bonds were cut, and there was a free fight, the crowd, as usual, taking the part of the outlaws. The little palmer kept close to Robin's side, but he did not notice her.

This time the combat was fiercer and more disastrous than it had ever been before. The retreat from the town was difficult, for the Sheriff had lined the approaches with soldiers. Robin himself was badly wounded in the hand, though not before he had made a great gash in the scalp of the Sheriff. The little palmer tried to bind up Robin's wound with her handkerchief, and then for the first time he recognized her. There was no time for explanations, for the case of the outlaws seemed desperate; but at that moment they saw a troop of armed men running toward them from a castle which stood on a hill at some distance from the town. For a moment Robin thought these were fresh enemies, but as they came nearer he saw that they were led by Sir Richard of the Lea.

"A Hood! a rescue!" he shouted; and very soon he was safely inside the walls of the castle, and the gates were closed.

"Traitor!" shouted the furious Sheriff as he came dashing up. "You harbour the enemies of your King."

"What I have done I will answer for to the King himself," said Sir Richard haughtily, stepping out upon the turret. "Be gone, and cease your brawling outside my walls."

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The Sheriff stayed some time longer, calling both the knight and his guests all manner of ill names ; but no one took any notice of him, and at last he drew off his men and went back to Nottingham, sick and dizzy with his wound, and torn with rage and disappointment.

Inside the castle there was great rejoicing. Wounds were dressed, and soon the whole party, washed and refreshed, gathered at dinner ; and there was laughing and talking and jesting in the intervals of prodigious attacks on the good things the knight had provided.

After dinner Sir Richard took Robin to his strong-room, and there counted out before him four hundred pounds.

" There," he said, " is the money you lent me, but I can never repay the greater boons you gave me—freedom for myself and my son to stay in our own dear country and live happily on our own land."

" No more words," interrupted Robin Hood rather testily, for he hated to be thanked. " All that I did for you has been fully repaid by what you did for us to-day. As for the money," he went on, his eyes twinkling, " why, your friend the Bishop paid that for you long ago."

" My friend the Bishop ?" said Sir Richard, and he looked so puzzled that Robin roared with laughter.

" Four hundred gold pieces, as I live, told out upon his cloak, and counted by Much and Little John." And then Robin told the whole story. Sir Richard was no less tickled than Robin had been, but he still held to his purpose of repayment.

" This is no reason why I should not pay my own debts," he said. " The four hundred pounds of the Bishop was yours, fairly earned—at least, according to your trade," he said slyly. " Now this——"

" When will the man stop talking !" said Robin impatiently. " I tell you that, outlaw as I am, I do not take money twice over." And he walked away, refusing to hear another word.

Next morning Robin and his band left the castle, carrying with them a gift from Sir Richard's lady of a hundred and forty stout yew bows of cunning make, with fine, waxed, silk strings

Robin Hood

and a hundred and forty sheaves of arrows each an ell long, set with peacocks' feathers and notched with silver. It was a gift after the men's own hearts, and sent them back to the greenwood in the highest spirits.

A few weeks later King Richard came with a small company of knights to visit Sir Richard of the Lea, who had fought by his side in the Holy Wars. He had heard from the Sheriff of the terrible ill-doings of the outlaws, and had come to look into the matter for himself.

"Who is this Robin Hood?" he said, after he had greeted his old comrade heartily.

"He is a brave man, your Majesty," answered Sir Richard, "and as loyal a subject as any you have. Think not that I would have helped him had he been a traitor."

Then he told the King the whole story of his dealings with Robin Hood. Up jumped Richard and smote his hand upon the table.

"A man indeed!" he cried, "and loyal, you say. Then he must be a King's man, and fight for me in these troubled times. I will find him—nay, I will go by myself," he said quickly, as he saw Sir Richard was about to offer himself as a guide. "Keep you my company here, and the second day, if I return not, send in search of me. 'Tis an adventure such as I love."

So the next day the King set out alone for the greenwood. All day he wandered without finding the band, and at night came, through a drizzling rain, to the hermitage where Friar Tuck lived with his dogs. The Friar had just sat down to his supper—a mighty pasty and a tankard of hot mulled wine—when there was such an uproar among his dogs as told him that a stranger was somewhere at hand.

"Go your ways," he shouted, "this is not a hostel. A few miles along the road you can find a lodging. Leave a poor friar to his prayers."

"I am wet and I know not the way," cried a voice in reply. "Open without more words."

At that there came such a mighty beating on the door that Friar Tuck thought it would be better to open than to have

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his door beaten down. There stood a knight in black armour with his horse.

"Thanks, Friar," he said. "I will be beholden to you for supper and a bed"; and he walked coolly in.

"But I have no supper and no bed to give you," protested the Friar.

"Then I will e'en have half of yours," said the visitor cheerfully; "that pasty looks as if it might serve for two at a pinch, and this wine." He lifted the tankard and took a mighty draught. "There is still a little left for you at the bottom an there be no more where this came from."

The Friar saw that it would be no use giving ill words and that he might as well make the best of things; indeed, he rather liked the look of this tall, bearded stranger, with his bronzed face, his golden-brown hair, and his blue eyes. So they sat down together and made a merry meal, and so well did they like each other's company that it was nearly dawn before they laid down on the floor, side by side, to sleep.

In the morning the knight rose, blithe as the larks that were singing gaily outside, helped to prepare the breakfast, and then helped to eat it.

"Before I go," he said, "tell me where I can find the outlaw, Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood?" said the Friar, quite shocked. "What should a holy friar know about an outlaw?"

"Nevertheless I think you could take me to him an you would," said the stranger.

"Well," replied the Friar, "one cannot well be in the forest without knowing something of Robin Hood. I will take you to him—and he will take your purse," said the Friar to himself. "It should be a well-filled one and a windfall to Robin."

So they set out, and a few miles along the road they met Robin himself.

"Hold!" he cried, pretending not to know Friar Tuck, who looked very innocent and uncomprehending.

"'Tis not my habit to hold for any man," quoth the knight.

Robin clapped his hands. Out came a company of his men.

Robin Hood

"I am a King's messenger," said the knight. "Have you no respect for your King?"

"Indeed have I," said Robin, doffing his cap. "God save the King. There is no more loyal subject than I through all the fair land of England. An you be a messenger from King Richard you must be my guest at dinner. Come now, for my men wax wrathful if the hour be overpast."

In high glee the King followed Robin to the glade where the meal was being prepared. Friar Tuck came too, and Maid Marian in the dress of a page, and all the seven score yeomen who belonged to the band. The feast went merrily, and the King's health was drank with lusty cheering. Then came sports, and the archers showed their visitor what they could do with the long-bow. Their custom was that he who failed to hit the target had to stand a buffet at the hand of one of the others. All escaped until it came to the turn of Robin, who shot last; and to the uproarious delight of his men his arrow somehow swerved and missed the mark.

"Now by my faith," said Robin, "I must abide the stroke, but it shall not come from one of my own men. From no less a hand than that of the King shall it come, through this his messenger. Therefore, Sir Knight, strike for your royal master."

But this did not suit Friar Tuck at all.

"Nay," he said. "I am a better man than he, and that will I prove."

"Prove it, then," said the knight, his eyes twinkling merrily. He stood up fair and square to abide the blow. Out came the Friar's great arm, and he struck with right good will. But the knight stood firm and upright; and Friar Tuck, who had looked for no less than to see him sprawling on the ground, gazed at him with such helpless surprise that the men, who were shouting out lusty cheers, broke into roars of laughter.

"Your turn now, Sir Knight," they cried; and a louder roar than ever broke out as the knight stepped forward, and coolly gave the Friar a blow which toppled him neatly over on to the ground, where he lay too astonished to pick himself up.

"Oh," thought Robin ruefully, "there shall I lie in a moment."

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He stepped forward, and had just opened his mouth to invite the knight's buffet when the shrill blast of a horn sounded through the forest.

"To arms!" cried Robin. The men hastily took their bows and stood ready. But, instead of the expected enemy, they saw Sir Richard of the Lea riding at the head of a troop which at that moment entered the glade.

Straight up to the knight went Sir Richard and, dismounting, bent the knee before him.

"I come according to your Majesty's orders," he said. "In good time, as I trust."

"Your Majesty!"—Robin Hood and his men looked at one another; then, the truth dawning upon them, like loyal fellows as they were, the whole band knelt before the King.

"Pardon, Sire," said Robin Hood, "pardon for the outlaws, who are your Majesty's faithful servants."

The King put on a stern look, but he could not maintain it as he gazed on this splendid band of men offering him their homage. His eyes shone with pride and satisfaction.

"Will you swear to be loyal and true?" he asked.

"We swear!" answered the deep voices of the men in a hearty chorus.

"Then rise," said Richard. "A free pardon you shall have and the King's favour. You shall be the Royal Archers of my own bodyguard, and shall fight for me and keep my forests from marauders who would kill my deer."

His eyes twinkled merrily once more, and the men looked somewhat shamefaced.

"I will find offices for you all, and you shall be honest men, serving instead of robbing your King. As for that pretty page there, if I mistake not, he is an old friend of mine."

Marian came forward blushing, and the King looked smilingly into her face.

"As I thought," he said, "it is Mistress Marian. And, now I remember, I have a gift for you—the estates of your father, the late Earl of Huntingdon, confiscated to the Crown and now restored."

Robin Hood

Marian began to speak, but Richard cut her thanks short.

"Where is Robin Hood?" he said, and Robin stepped forward.

"For you," said the King sternly, "there is one condition you must fulfil before the free pardon I have granted to the rest can be extended to you, their leader and the greatest offender against your King."

"And what is that, Sire?" asked Robin, somewhat taken aback.

"That you marry this lady, Mistress Marian, without delay."

Robin's clouded face shone with delight.

"That will I do right willingly, an she permit," he said, "and if all the commands your Majesty gives me are as welcome as this one, then shall I be the most loyal servant that king ever had."

So Robin married Marian, and he and his band lived on in the forest they loved, guarding it for the King. Sometimes, when Richard had need of them, they went into battle with him against his enemies and bore themselves right valiantly; and never was king better served than was Richard of the Lion Heart by the stout outlaws he had pardoned so royally.

CHAPTER XI

PRINCE MARKO

LIKE the Robin Hood ballads in England, the Serbian national songs have sprung from the heart and soul of the common people. The conditions in which the peasantry lived aided their growth, for "Tell us a story" is always heard where young and old forgather round the blazing logs.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century it was customary for the sons of a family to continue to dwell after marriage in cottages built for them within the outer wall of the paternal domain, and often a *Zadrooga*, as the family group was termed, numbered a hundred souls or more. On winter evenings this community would meet in the great-room of the eldest member of the family, and what would be more enjoyable than the recitation of familiar lays which told of wonderful events in the history of the fatherland?

Even to-day wandering minstrels attract the people to them at village fairs or church festivals. Many of them are blind, and we are reminded of the greatest story-teller of all time—Homer, who long ages before wandered through Greece reciting to the people the marvellous tales of Odysseus and of Troy. But the verse of the blind old Greek resounds through time with the majesty of some great cathedral organ, whereas the poetry of the Serbian ballads is primitive and monotonous, like the music of the *gousle* (an instrument with a single string), to the sound of which they are recited.

The royal Prince Marko, the outstanding figure in Serbian ballads, although he lived at the end of the fourteenth century, is in some respects nearer to the earlier heroes than to those of his own time. He has a marvellous horse who helps him in

Prince Marko

all his adventures, and he is befriended by supernatural beings, or *veele*, who appear to him and help him from time to time. The explanation of this is that the Serbians are a primitive people, among whom old superstitions and beliefs still linger, and it would therefore seem to them unnatural if their national hero did not receive strength and help from the unseen powers which, they firmly believe, have so great an influence on all the details of their own life.

The most striking characteristics of Marko, after his loyalty and courage and strength, are his sympathy with all who are in trouble and his coolness in the face of danger. To the Serbian people, living as they have done for so long under foreign tyranny and in constant fear of some new aggression, such qualities have naturally a strong appeal.

IF you were to travel through Serbia and talk to the peasants living in the villages there, you would find that every one of them could tell you something about the great Prince Marko, who lived during the last years of the fourteenth century. Some of them would tell you that his father was King Voukashin of Serbia and his mother the beautiful Queen Helen; others that he was the son of a dragon and a *veela*. *Veele* is the name the Serbians give to the beautiful nymphs, with gleaming golden hair and clad in airy robes of dazzling whiteness, who, they believe, inhabit the forests and streams.

But, whichever of these traditions the peasants favour, they all believe that Marko possessed courage and strength and wisdom beyond that of any ordinary mortal, and to prove this they would probably recite to you one of the many ballads known to every Serbian which tell of Prince Marko's wonderful deeds. But first you would have to hear something about the Prince's famous horse, Sharatz, for Sharatz was his master's constant companion, and helped him in all his adventures. He was a curious-looking beast, piebald like an ox, but he had marvellous powers. He was stronger and swifter than any horse that was ever known; he could leap the length of three lances into the air and four lance-lengths forward. He was almost as good a

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warrior as his master, for he would trample to death crowds of the enemy and bite off the ears of their horses ; he could send flames of fire out of his nostrils and set stones flying from under his hoofs so that they struck his foes like bullets. When his master was fighting Sharatz would suddenly kneel down just as Marko's opponent struck at him with a lance ; and sometimes he would fight with the opponent's horse on his own account, tearing and striking with his forefeet.

It is no wonder that Marko loved his horse, and valued him very highly. He fed him from his own plate, and always gave him half of each draught of wine he poured out for himself, and as we are told that the bowl from which he usually drank held forty-eight pints, it is clear that Sharatz must often have taken some very deep draughts. But Marko, the Serbians say, was never once drunk, so Sharatz probably was never drunk either ; for his master depended very much on his watchfulness, and would often go to sleep on his back while riding through an enemy's country, knowing that his faithful horse would give him warning if danger were near.

Nearly all the ballads about Prince Marko tell of some deed done to relieve the people from the tyranny of their oppressors, the Turks and the Moors. The story of how Prince Marko abolished the wedding tax is a great favourite.

One morning the Prince rode out on Sharatz across the plain of Kossovo and met a maiden whose unusual appearance made him look at her attentively. She was tall, and her form was lithe and graceful ; her eyes were bright and her cheeks rose-tinted ; but instead of shining locks grey hair surrounded her fair face.

Marko greeted her courteously, after the custom of the country, and she returned his greeting ; but when very kindly and gently he asked the reason why so young and blooming a maid had the hair of an old woman she burst into tears.

" It is because," she sobbed, " I cannot marry my sweetheart, whom I love so dearly. A Moor has taken possession of all this plain of Kossovo, and he insists that all maids who wish to marry shall pay to him a tax of thirty ducats, and all bridegrooms shall

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pay thirty-four ducats. We are poor and I cannot pay the tax, and so, alas ! I must remain unwed."

Marko's anger rose when he heard these words. "Tell me," he said, "where I can find this Moor."

But the girl was unwilling to send him to the tyrant's dwelling.

"Is it that you wish to marry, and go to pay your tax?" she said. "Beware of this man, or he will do you harm."

Marko tried to reassure her. "Here is a purse of thirty ducats," he said, "take it and go to your home, fearing nothing. Only tell me where I can find this lord, and I will pay your tax."

Then the girl, her face glowing with happiness, pointed out the gorgeous silken pavilion of the Moor, with the tents of his followers standing around it.

"His garden," she said, "is adorned with the heads of seventy-seven Christian warriors. Take care, O unknown knight, that he does not add yours to the number; for, night and day, forty of his servants keep guard, that no foe may enter."

Marko thanked her and rode off toward the tents. His eyes flamed and his tears fell fast, so wroth was he that a stranger should thus oppress his countrymen. He grasped his club, a mighty weapon which weighed a hundred pounds; sixty pounds were of steel, thirty pounds of silver, and the rest of pure gold. Sharatz shared his master's anger, and sent the sparks flying from under his hoofs and a terrible blue flame out from his nostrils. The watching servants of the Moor saw the dread pair rushing upon them, and ran to warn their master.

"He comes to bring his wedding tax," replied the Moor, "and is angry because he is forced to pay it. Take his horse and send him in to me."

But to lay hands on Sharatz was more than any of these servants dared do. Instead, they ran and hid themselves, and Marko got down from his horse in front of the Moor's tent without any assistance.

"Walk here up and down," he said to Sharatz; "do not go far away, for I may need you."

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Boldly he entered the pavilion. There sat the Moor, lounging in lazy comfort, while a Christian maiden poured out wine for him to drink. Marko saluted him with courtesy, and he answered, bidding his visitor be seated and drink.

"I have no time for drinking," said Marko. "My bride and my wedding-guests await me on the road. What is the amount that I must pay you as tax?"



THE SERVANTS OF THE MOOR RUN AWAY FROM MARKO

"For ordinary people," said the Moor, "it is thirty ducats for the bride and thirty-four for the bridegroom. You, by your appearance, are wealthy and of high birth. It is fitting that you should pay me one hundred ducats."

"I have no more than three," said Marko, taking three coins from his pocket, "the rest I will pay you when I receive the gifts that my friends will offer at my marriage."

Up jumped the angry Moor. "Pay me at once!" he cried, "and do not dare to speak to me in such a manner"; and he struck Marko three or four times on the shoulder with his club.

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"Is this a jest?" said Marko, "or do you strike me in earnest?"

"Jest? No. I chastise you in earnest," shouted the furious Moor, raining down his blows.

"Oh, then," replied Marko, smiling pleasantly, "I too will strike in earnest," and with one blow of his club he struck the Moor's head from his shoulders.

Smiling still, he drew his sword, and struck off the heads of the forty servants, all except four, whom he left that they might tell what they had seen. These he sent out to make proclamation in the country round that no young man or maiden need henceforth pay the wedding tax, for Marko had paid it all for them.

He reverently buried the heads of the Christian warriors; and then, on proud Sharatz, he rode out from the Moor's garden back to the city, where crowds waited to greet him and hail him as their deliverer.

There is another, longer ballad about Prince Marko and a Moor which is often recited in the winter evenings when a Serbian family gathers round the fire after the work of the day is done. This tells of a rich Moor who built for himself a beautiful palace and filled it with rich hangings and costly furniture; and then, because he did not wish to live in it alone, he desired a wife. So he sent a letter to the Sultan at Istamboul demanding his daughter in marriage.

"If you refuse to give her to me," he said, "you must come out to meet me in single combat."

There was dismay and weeping in the Sultan's palace when this letter came. It could not be thought of that he would give his fair daughter to the dark-skinned, hated Moor. That would be a foul disgrace. Yet he dared not meet the despised suitor in battle. Instead, he called on his warriors to be his champions, and go out to fight against this arrogant and impudent Moor.

One after another the bravest of his nobles went out to the combat; and one after another they fell, until there remained none who would dare stand up to meet the dreaded challenger. The Sultan was in despair; and then a worse thing happened.

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The Moor, impatient of further delay, set out to Istamboul to claim his bride. He mounted his horse Bedevia and rode toward the city.

Outside the walls he encamped, stuck his lance into the ground, and bound Bedevia to it. Then he sent word to the Sultan that day by day he must be supplied with one sheep, one batch of white loaves, one keg of brandy, two barrels of red wine, and a beautiful maiden. The food he devoured and the maiden he sold into captivity, and this went on for three or four months.

At the end of that time the Moor once again grew impatient. Mounting Bedevia, he rode up to the Sultan's palace, loudly demanding his daughter. When he received no answer he broke all the windows of the palace with his club; and the Sultan, in fear, at last promised to give his daughter to the unwelcome suitor.

"It is well," said the Moor. "I will go back to my castle and prepare everything to receive her. In fifteen days I will come again and take her away."

The poor Princess was distracted with grief and shame when she heard of the promise that her father had made. She wept and lamented, and her mother, too, knew not what to do for sorrow. They tried to think of some plan to prevent this dreadful thing from coming to pass, but no idea came to them; until one night the Sultana had a dream. A figure appeared before her and said, "There is one man and one only who can save your daughter, and that is Prince Marko, known to all men as a great hero. He lives in the city of Prilip, on the plain of Kossovo, which belongs to the Empire of Serbia. Send to him and he will help you."

Next morning the Sultana told her dream to her husband, and at once he sent off messengers to Marko, promising that if he would come to their help he should receive three *tovars*, or horse-loads, of golden ducats. But Marko, for some reason, was unwilling to come, so he sent back word that he dared not meet the Moor. "Do we not all know that he is invincible? If he should cleave my head asunder, of what use would three *tovars*, or three thousand *tovars* of gold be to me?"



MARKO AND THE TURKISH MAIDEN
William Sewell

Prince Marko

A second message was sent promising five *tovars*, but again came a refusal. Then the terror-stricken Princess determined to write herself. She scratched her beautiful cheek with her pen, and wrote in letters of blood, beseeching Marko, by God and St John, to save her from the disgraceful fate that threatened her, and promising seven *tovars* of gold and other precious gifts.

This time Marko's heart was touched, and he resolved to go, even if death awaited him. He put on a cloak and cap made of wolves' skins, took his weapons, mounted Sharatz, and rode off to Istamboul.

There he took up his quarters at an inn, and at evening he led Sharatz down to a lake to drink. But the noble horse would not touch the water. He turned his head from side to side, and Marko, looking round, saw a Turkish maiden covered with a beautiful gold-embroidered veil. She stood at the edge of the water and bowed down toward it.

"God bless thee, O beauteous green lake," she said, "God bless thee, for thou art to be my home for evermore. I am now to die, O beauteous lake ; rather would I choose such a fate than become the bride of the cruel Moor."

Then Marko knew that this was the Princess, and he went up to her, and asked her why she grieved. She told him all her story, and cursed the hardness of heart of Prince Marko, who had refused to help her.

"Lo, here is Marko," he replied, "curse him not."

For a moment the Princess looked at him as if she dared not believe his words ; then his noble bearing and his proud glance told her that this was indeed the champion she had sought. Tearfully she prayed him to save her, and Marco swore that while his head was on his shoulders she should never marry her hated suitor.

"Tell your mother," he said, "to send supper for me down to the inn, and tell her to be sure to send plenty of wine. Do not fear. I will save you. If the Moor comes and demands you, let your parents give you to him and let him ride away with you. I know the place where I can rescue you from his power."

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The Princess hastened home and told her parents, and they joyfully sent down a delicious supper with great jars of the red wine that Marko loved. That evening he sat very comfortably in his inn after his good meal, pouring out bowlfuls of wine, drinking half himself and giving half to Sharatz.

By and by he noticed that the town seemed very quiet, and just then the landlord came in and began shutting and barring the window.

"Why is everyone so quiet?" asked Marko.

"Because the Moor is coming to-night to claim the Princess," the landlord answered, "and for fear of him we have all shut up and barred our houses."

"Leave this door open," said Marko. "I should like to see this terrible Moor."

Just at that moment there arose in the street a loud noise—horses trampling, men shouting, weapons rattling. Marko looked out and saw the Moor with five hundred black followers, all gorgeously arrayed, riding through the streets. The Moor noticed that only one door in all the city was open—that of the inn—and he wondered who it was that was so bold as to be ready to face him in this way. But he had no time to find out just then. He and his followers encamped for the night, and the next day they rode up to the Sultan's palace. The poor shrinking Princess was given up to him with all her wedding gifts, and the grand procession rode back through the streets on its way out of the town.

Marko had again placed himself near the inn door, and was sitting at his ease pouring out red wine and sharing it with Sharatz. This time the Moor made up his mind to see what was going on inside the house with the open door, so he turned Bedevia toward it. But Sharatz faced round and kicked the other horse savagely, so that the Moor thought it best to ride back to his company.

Then up rose Marko and put on his wolf's cap and cloak, so that he looked like a wild and savage creature. He mounted Sharatz and dashed up to the procession. Striking right and left, he felled one horseman after another, and wild fear came on all

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at the onslaught of this terrifying foe. The Moor, filled with anger, turned to meet him with scornful, boasting words.

"By my faith!" he said, "I shall draw in the reins of my Bedevia and shall spring over thy body seven times; then shall I strike off thy head."

But when he spurred Bedevia to the attack Sharatz struck at him with his forefeet and bit off his ear. Then for four hours Prince Marko and the Moor fought together, until the Moor turned and fled; but Marko flung his club after him so that he fell from his horse, his head severed from his shoulders.

Then Marko returned to deal with the rest of the company; but all had fled, and there was the Princess standing alone. In triumph Marko brought her back to her home, and cast the head of the Moor at the Sultan's feet. He did not stay for thanks, but started back at once for his own country. The grateful father sent the promised gifts after him, and from that time there was firm friendship between Prince Marko and the family of the Sultan.

Still another ballad tells how Marko loved his friends and helped them when they were in trouble.

It happened once that during a war between the Magyars and the Serbians, the Magyar commander, General Voutcha, captured three Serbian heroes—Milosh of Potzerye, Milan of Toplitza, and Ivan Kosantchitch. He was so delighted that he made a great feast and ordered the guns of his fort to be fired, that the people in the country round might ask what great victory had been won and be told the good news.

While the feast was going merrily on the three captives were lying miserably in the deepest dungeon beneath the general's castle. It was a horrible place, where not a ray of light could enter, and foul water rose almost to the knees of the unhappy prisoners.

After three days of misery, during which no one came near to bring them food or comfort, two of them had completely given up hope and resigned themselves to death. But the third, Milosh of Potzerye, still raged against his cruel fate and looked

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continually through the grating of the door into the dark passage beyond, hoping to find some means of release.

As the third day was drawing to a close he saw the form of a man passing along this passage, and called to him eagerly, greeting him as "brother-in-God," and beseeching him to bring a roll on which a message could be written. The man, moved by pity, and flattered to be called the brother-in-God of a great hero such as Milosh, did as he was entreated. He brought a roll and a pen, and Milosh wrote quickly a passionate, despairing appeal to Prince Marko.

"Fate has been hard, and I have fallen, O brother, into the hands of a foe. The Magyar Voutcha has captured me, and my two brothers-in-arms. We have been immured in this vile dungeon for three whole days, and it is impossible that we should remain for another three days and live. Therefore, if thou wouldst see us again rescue us, O brother, either by heroic deeds or by ransom."

This letter he signed in blood, drawn from a scratch that he made in his cheek. He promised the man a great reward if he would carry it at once to Marko, and the man agreed to do so. Riding hard, he reached the city of Prilip on the morning of the next day, which was Sunday, and met Prince Marko just as he was coming out of church.

Marko took the letter, and when he had read it the tears ran down his cheeks, and he swore that he would save his comrades. Not a moment was to be lost. Marko dressed himself in his suit of wolfs' skins and took his weapons in his hand; and he did not forget to hang a leathern bottle of red wine on one side of his saddle to balance the mighty club which hung on the other.

Sharatz was as impatient as his master to set off, and as soon as Marko sprang on his back he flew off like the wind. When he came to the river Danube he did not pause, but dashed in and swam across, and set off again at a gallop as soon as he had scrambled out on the opposite side. So he brought his master to the plain before Varadin, and there, within sight of the general's castle, Marko pitched his tent and sat down to rest.

Prince Marko

He took the leathern bottle and poured out a bowlful of wine, drinking half himself and giving half to his horse. He filled the bowl again and again, sitting there alone in the midst of his enemies as quietly and comfortably as if he had been in his own house with all his followers about him.

From a window of the castle a fair lady, looking out, saw the stranger sitting at his ease over his wine. She was the daughter-in-law of General Voutcha, and she hurried to him at once and described what she had seen.

"Oh!" said the General when he heard her tale. "A presumptuous fellow indeed! But do not be afraid. It will be an easy matter to take him prisoner, and soon he shall lie with his three countrymen in the dungeon beneath the castle. Velimir!" he cried, calling to his son, "take three hundred horsemen and bring in the stranger who dares to sit and drink wine in front of our castle."

Velimir summoned the horsemen, and away went the whole troop against the calm and haughty Marko, who still sat at his ease drinking his wine, while Sharatz rested close by. The horse was the first to notice the enemy, and he struck his right forefoot upon the ground to warn his master.

"They come then," said Marko. "I will drink one more draught and then I shall be ready."

So he emptied the bowl once more, then threw it on the ground, and when the troop of Magyars drew near they found him mounted on Sharatz, his club in his hand, and his eyes shining with such a fierce light that they were afraid to come nearer.

He dashed in among them, and they scattered like pigeons before a falcon. Some he drove into the Danube, some he slew with his sword, and the rest Sharatz, who fought as fiercely as his master, trod underfoot.

When Velimir saw how the fight was going he turned his horse and galloped back toward the castle. Marko saw him, but could not follow, for Sharatz was tired out. So he threw his mace with such skill that the handle just touched the youth and brought him to the ground. Then the victor bound him with

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cords so that he could not move ; and, stretching himself comfortably on the grass once more, Marko poured out another bowlful of wine.

Velimir's wife, who had been watching from the window of the castle, ran sobbing to tell the General of the terrible disaster that had befallen her husband and his troop.

"What!" roared the infuriated General. "Three hundred



MARKO FIGHTING WITH HIS SABRE IN HIS RIGHT HAND, HIS LANCE IN HIS LEFT, AND HOLDING SHARATZ'S REINS BETWEEN HIS TEETH

cannot take him ! Bring out then three thousand. I will lead them out myself, and terrible shall be his punishment. Fire all the great guns at this impudent stranger."

Mad with rage, he rode swiftly from the gates and ordered his men to spread themselves so as to form a wide circle round the enemy. Marko, lazily sipping his wine, did not notice the movements of the troop, and was only roused when Sharatz bounded warningly up to him. One look was enough to show him what had happened, and he was in the saddle and dashing through

Prince Marko

the enemy's line almost before they had realized that he had risen from the ground.

He fought with his sabre in his right hand and his lance in his left, and he held Sharatz's reins between his teeth. Again and again he made a fierce rush into the midst of the enemy's ranks, killing so many that the rest ran away in the wildest disorder. He flung his club at General Voutcha and brought him to the ground, as he had brought his son; and, after binding his hands and feet, he put him on Sharatz's saddle and brought him to the place where Velimir lay groaning. Then he tied the father and son on the General's horse, and mounting Sharatz, rode back to Prilip, where he threw them both into a dungeon.

A few days later came a letter from Voutcha's wife offering an enormous ransom for her husband and her son. Marko replied, saying:

"Behold, thou faithful consort of General Voutcha. If thou desirest that I should release my prisoners, thou hast but to release my old friends, Milan of Toplitza and Ivan Kosantchitch and give to each three *tovars* of gold to compensate him for the time he has spent in prison; and thou must also give me a like sum, for I have had to overwork my good Sharatz. As for my friend, Milosh of Potzerye, I authorize him to settle his own affairs with you in person, for I agree to whatsoever he may arrange."

As soon as she received this message, Voutcha's wife hastened to send off the money. Then she caused the prisoners to be released, sent for barbers to trim their hair and their nails, and gave them costly garments to replace their rags. She made a grand feast for them, and after the feast she told them what Marko had done.

"O noble Serbians," she said, "entreat this dread Prince to spare my husband and my son. You are his friends, and he will listen to your words."

"Do not fear, O lady," answered Milosh of Potzerye. "Marko is noble and generous, and thoughts of revenge come not into his heart. I will obtain pardon for Voutcha and Velimir—of that you may be sure. Only give me these three things—the best

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horse from the General's stables, the one that Voutcha rides when he goes in state, once a year, to the church at Tekiye; the gilded coach drawn by twelve Arab horses in which he rides when he goes to visit the Emperor at Vienna; and the fine raiment that he wears on Easter Day."

"This I will gladly do," said the lady, "and I will give to each of you in addition a thousand ducats to buy wine to refresh you on your way back to Prilip."

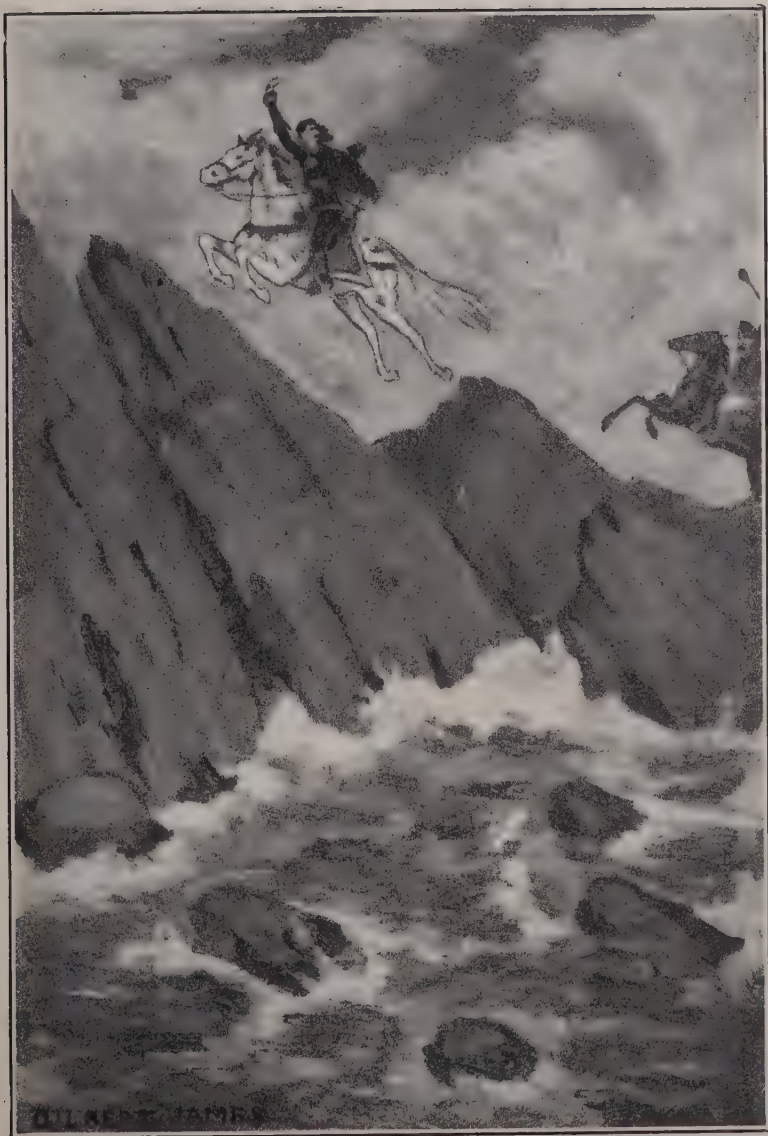
So Milosh took the fine raiment and put it upon Milan of Toplitza, who was an old man and one of the greatest heroes and patriots among the Serbian peoples, and he gave Milan the place of honour in the General's coach. Then he and Ivan Kosantchitch mounted the coach also, and so they were driven back to Prilip.

Marko came out to meet them, rejoicing to see his loved comrades once more. He released Voutcha and Velimir and sent them safely back to Varadin, and after the four friends had feasted together they went back each to his own domains.

When the time came for Marko to die a *veela* came to him in the dawn of a Sabbath morning as he rode by the seashore. In submission he received from her the decree that his life must now end, and calmly he made his preparations. First, he killed his faithful horse, for he could not bear to think that Sharatz might fall into the hands of the Turks. Then he fulfilled all the rites commanded by the *veela*, threw his club into the sea, spread his cloak on the grass, lay down, drawing his fur cap over his eyes, and died.

After a week had passed his body was found by an abbot and his deacon, who, after lamenting loudly, brought it to the white church Vilindar, where it was buried; but the exact place was not marked, lest an enemy might come and steal the body away.

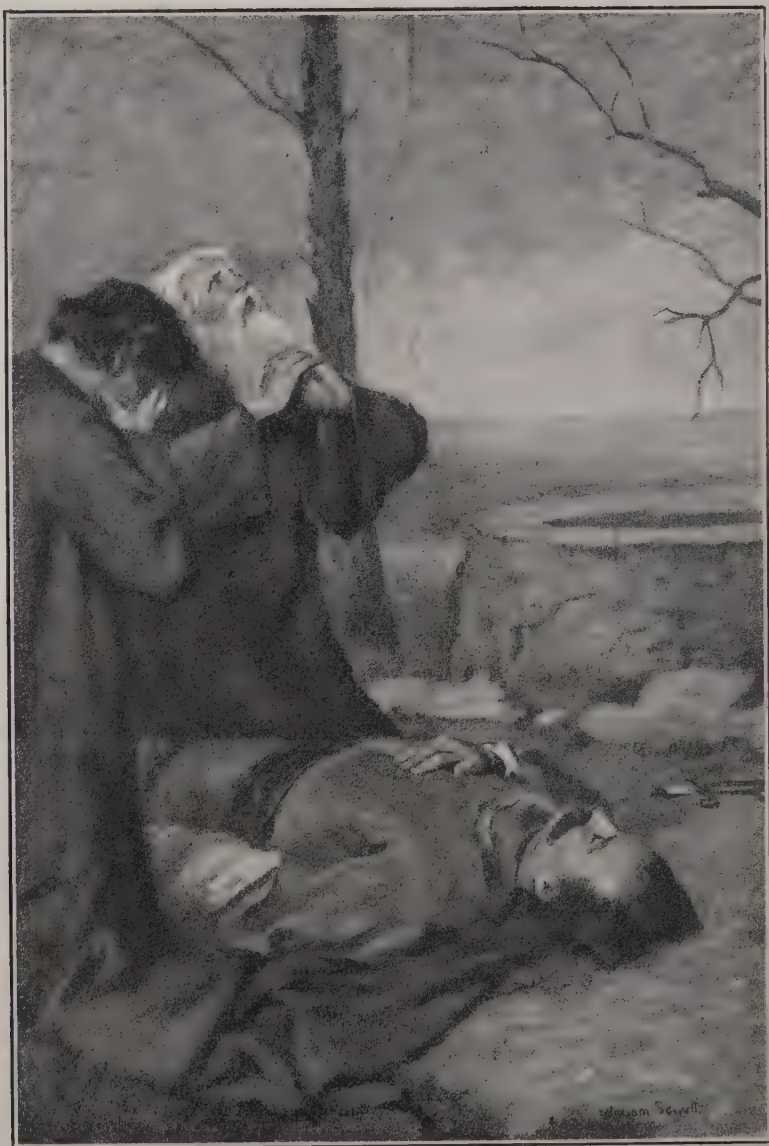
Most of the Serbians, however, do not believe that he is dead, but are convinced that he lies sleeping in a cave near his castle at Prilip. From time to time he awakes and comes to succour his country when it is in sore trouble. How firmly they believe this is witnessed by the following story of the Balkan War, told



"SHARATZ COULD LEAP THE LENGTH OF THREE LANCES
INTO THE AIR"

Gilbert James

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THE DEATH OF MARKO
William Sewell

Prince Marko

by the General who commanded the Serbian forces. The incident which he relates occurred at the battle of Prilip, fought in November 1912.

Our infantry . . . were to wait at the foot of the mount of Prilip, on which stood the Castle of Marko, for the effect of our artillery, which was superior both in numbers and quality to that of the Turks. They were especially cautioned against storming the fort before they received the order from their commander-in-chief. . . . During the early morning the infantry kept quiet, but at the first cannon-shots we noticed an effervescence among our troops, and soon afterward we heard them shouting frantically and saw them running like wolves straight to the castle of the Royal Prince Marko. I could hear the voice of our Captain Agatonovitch, commanding them to stop and await the General's order. When the immediate commanders saw that discipline proved futile, they essayed in vain to appeal to the soldiers' reason, assuring them of certain death if they would not await at least the effect of our artillery. Our warriors, deafened by the roaring of the Turkish siege-cannon and mitrailleuses, ran straight into the fire, and appeared to fall in dozens! The sight was horrible. I was unable to stop my soldiers. . . .

In a little while our artillery ceased firing, lest they should kill their own comrades, who were now crossing bayonets with the Turkish infantry. A few minutes later we saw the Serbian national colours fluttering on the donjon of Kralyevitch Marko's castle. The Turks were fleeing in greatest disorder. The Serbian victory was as complete as it was rapid!

When we arrived on the scene a little later, a parade was ordered. After calling together the troops we found our loss had been comparatively insignificant. I praised my heroes for their brave conduct, but reproached them bitterly for disobedience. At my last admonishing words I heard from thousands of soldiers in majestic unison:

"Kralyevitch Marko commanded us all the time: FORWARD! Did you not see him on his Sharatz?"

It was clear to me that the tradition of Kralyevitch Marko was so deeply engraved on the hearts of those honest and heroic men that, in their vivid enthusiasm, they had seen the incarnation of their hero.

CHAPTER XII

WILLIAM TELL

WILLIAM TELL has lived in the hearts of so many generations of Swiss that the people are indignant when doubt is cast upon any details in his picturesque story. The truth is, however, that it has grown, like all the foregoing stories in our collection, from the imagination of storytellers, who, one by one, added details and embroidery as the spirit moved them. Gessler and the Swiss patriots mentioned in the story really lived, but Tell himself is merely an embodiment of the qualities which appealed to a hardy people who dwelt among the mountains and to whom love of liberty was more than all else in life. He is the typical Swiss mountaineer, content to live hardily and to earn his bread dangerously, not desiring riches or distinction, but determined to keep his liberty.

In 1273 Rudolf of Hapsburg, an Austrian noble, was elected the head of the Holy Roman Empire. He had a small estate in the north of the country we now know as Switzerland, and to the east of this estate lay the three forest cantons of Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwald.

Rudolf was a mild and benevolent ruler, but his son Albert, who succeeded him, was harsh and severe. In 1307 he determined to bring the Swiss under the yoke of Austria, and began by claiming certain dues and taxes from the Cantons. He sent men to collect the taxes who carried out their duty with harshness and cruelty, and he set bailiffs over the Cantons who oppressed and ill-treated the people until, driven to rebellion, they drove out their tyrants and formed a new, independent country—the land of the Schwitzers, or Switzerland.

The great hero of this war of independence is William Tell. Even after he had become famous, Tell never altered his simple

William Tell

way of living, but died as he had lived, a simple peasant among peasants like himself.

IT was a calm, still night in the autumn of the year 1307. The waters of Lake Lucerne lay silvern in the moonlight, and from the glittering tops of the snow-covered mountains shining slopes ran down to the shadowy pasture-lands below. Everything was very quiet and peaceful. The time was long past midnight, and the whole world seemed asleep.

A sound of many footsteps on the mountain paths broke the silence. Dim forms began to gather on the little grassy plateau at the foot of the Seelisberg mountain. More and more came softly along the winding path until there were three bands, each of ten men and their leader, standing still and resolute in the shadow of the rocky height. They came from the three forest cantons of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwald, and they were all hardy mountaineers, men who had been born and bred within a few miles of that place.

The three leaders stepped forward. One was an old, white-bearded man, upright and stately. His face was mild and benevolent, though just now it looked very stern and resolute. This was Walter Fürst, the wealthiest and most respected man in the canton of Uri. The next was a dark-haired, dark-eyed man of middle age, sturdy and powerful; the third was younger, taller and slighter, with glowing eyes and quick, eager movements. These two were also men of mark in their cantons; their names were Arnold von Melchthal and Werner Stauffacher. All three wore the plain and simple dress of Swiss peasants—a tunic with a broad leather belt, a coloured hunting-shirt, and high boots.

“We are met here,” said Walter Fürst, “to confirm the resolve we made when last we talked together of our country’s wrongs. Each of us since then has held secret converse with the men of his canton. I myself have gone about through Uri, and I have found all willing and eager to rise against the tyrant. Since the Austrians sent Gessler to rule over us things have gone from bad to worse, and the men of Uri have sworn that

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they will bear no longer with his cruelty and oppression. What say their brothers of the other two forest cantons ? ”

“ Every man in Schwyz will fight to the death ! ” cried von Melchthal ; and Stauffacher shouted, “ Unterwald can scarce wait for the call to the battlefield.”

“ Think of Rollin, a fugitive among the mountains, hunted like a wild beast, parted from his wife, his children, and his home merely because he struck down the man who had foully insulted his wife,” cried Arnold von Melchthal, turning to the men who stood at a little distance from their leaders.

“ Aye, and think of poor old Undern, with his eyes put out, shut up in a loathsome dungeon, because his son lifted a hand against the bailiff’s man who without claim or right unyoked his oxen and drove them off, saying with taunts that his master had need of them,” cried the fiery Stauffacher.

“ We do think of them,” came the answer from many voices, “ and we will avenge them.” Strong hands gripped bows and hunting-knives, and there were loud and angry murmurs. “ We will fight ! ” “ We will throw down the tyrants ! ” “ Down with the Austrians ! ” “ We will be free ! ”

The calm, deep voice of Walter Fürst stilled the rising tumult.

“ Swear, then,” he said ; “ swear to be true to the cause and to fight to the death to free your country from the tyrant. Our motto shall be, ‘ One for all and all for one.’ Swear that you will bear it always in your minds and in your hearts.”

The three leaders joined their left hands in a firm grasp, and raised their right hands, with three fingers lifted, toward heaven.

“ We swear ! ” they said solemnly ; and from their followers there came a fervent response, “ We swear ! One for all and all for one.”

“ On the first day of the new year, then,” said Walter Fürst, “ be ready. Till then, silence and secrecy.”

The dawn was breaking as the men went down the mountain paths toward their homes. Among them was a man tall and strong and agile, with a noble face and clear, fearless eyes. He had been in the band that followed Walter Fürst, who was his father-in-law, and he had joined quietly but very fervently in



GESSLER AND TELL
J. C. Dollman



TELL SHOOTS STRAIGHT AND TRUE TO THE TYRANT'S HEART

J. C. Dollman

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William Tell

the response to the oath which the leaders had taken. Now he went toward his home, a cottage at Bürglen, among the mountains, with a firm, quick step, treading lightly and easily over difficult places, and scarcely noting where he went, so deep was he in thought. But he never missed the way, or took a false step, for he knew the mountain paths so well that he could walk them as easily in that dim morning light as in full day. He was the best climber and the boldest hunter in the three cantons, and his name was William Tell.

A few weeks after the midnight meeting William Tell went one day, taking with him his seven-year-old son, to the little town of Altdorf, which was near his home. The two went happily along together until they came to the market-place; but to the little boy's disappointment scarcely a person was to be seen. There was no pleasant stir and bustle such as had delighted him on former visits, and he looked round curiously to see if he could discover the cause.

All was as usual except that in the middle of the market-place a great pole was stuck up, and on the top of the pole was a hat—a very grand hat with a feather and a gold buckle. Four Austrian soldiers stood on each side of the pole.

William Tell, holding his little son by the hand, walked straight across the square, taking no notice of the hat or of the soldiers who guarded it. But he had gone only a few steps past them when they rushed out upon him.

"Throw him into prison!" they cried, "he has not bowed to Gessler's hat which stands there as a sign of the might of Austria. Gessler has commanded that all who pass by shall do it reverence, and this man has not even glanced toward it."

They seized William Tell roughly, while the frightened child clung closely to him. With flashing eyes Tell pushed them away, and stood looking so fiercely on them that for a moment they hung back. People came running into the market-place from the houses and streets round about and a great commotion arose. Tell was well known in the town, and many voices were raised to explain to him what was going on.

The hated Gessler had placed the hat in the square that

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morning. Some few of the inhabitants of Altdorf had bowed before it, but most had kept out of the market-place. Those who had been obliged to pass that way had gone to the priest and begged him to stand by the pole, holding the Holy Sacrament in his hands; then when they had bowed they had said they had done it in reverence to the Holy Sacrament, and the soldiers could not take them, for they had, in fact, bowed before the pole.

While the men of Altdorf were pouring out this story to William Tell Gessler himself rode into the market-place. He saw who it was that his soldiers had taken prisoner, and a smile of satisfaction came upon his dark, cruel face. He knew Tell well and hated him—hated him for his proud and fearless spirit, for the glance of scorn which had often told the tyrant how he was despised and detested, though the man's tongue was silent; hated him, too, for his strength and courage and skill which helped to make him a leader among his fellows.

When Tell saw the governor he cried out boldly, "I appeal for justice. Bid these men let me go. I have done no wrong."

Gessler got down from his horse and came toward the excited group. The people drew back from him with dark and sullen looks and angry murmurs. He looked round on them with the cruel smile of satisfaction still on his face.

"You shall have justice," he said; "more than justice. You shall have a chance to win your pardon for this disobedience. Men say that you have wonderful skill as an archer." He turned to his soldiers. "Take an apple," he commanded, "and put it on this child's head. Then let him stand under yonder linden-tree, and let the father shoot at the apple. If he hits it he shall go free."

Tell caught the hand of his son, who through all the disturbance had clung closely to him, then turned, and looked at Gessler. He did not speak, but the people round about—there was a great crowd now—made a loud, angry murmuring, and some of them raised their hands as if to strike down the Austrians. But the little boy laughed happily. This, he thought, was an easy thing to do. He had seen his father hit smaller marks

William Tell

than an apple, at a distance greater than this to the linden-tree, which could not be more than a hundred and fifty paces. It would be all right, and they would soon be free ; and the people, Gessler, and his Austrians, and all, would see how well his father could shoot.

He pulled his hand from his father's and took the apple the soldier had brought. Then he ran over to the linden-tree, laughing joyously.

"Shoot now, father," he cried, placing the apple on his head. "I will stand quite still."

Very slowly Tell took his bow. The people were very quiet, except the Austrian soldiers who were laughing rudely.

"He will not do it," said Gessler with a sneer ; "these Swiss dogs are cowards and no marksmen, though they boast so loudly of what they can do."

Tell took two arrows from his quiver, put one inside the bosom of his tunic, and with the other took careful aim at the apple. It pierced the fruit, and the two halves fell to the ground.

The little boy, radiant with pride and delight, picked up the pieces and ran with them toward the group of Swiss and Austrians who were standing in astounded silence.

"See what my father has done !" he shouted ; "here is the apple."

Then the others found their voices. The Swiss cried out in triumph ; the Austrians muttered angrily. Gessler's face was very dark.

William Tell stood silent in the midst, showing neither joy nor triumph. He lifted the little boy and kissed him. As he set him down Gessler spoke.

"Why did you take two arrows when you were to shoot only one ?" he asked.

Tell looked at him steadily. "I meant the second one for you," he said, "if with the first I killed my son."

Then Gessler fell into a terrible passion. "Take this man," he shouted, "and throw him into the boat that is waiting for me on the lake. He shall not be killed, since I promised to spare his life, but he shall never again see the light of the sun

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or moon, for he shall remain in a dungeon under the ground where serpents shall devour him alive."

The little boy screamed at these dreadful words, and the people around cried out in horror. But the Austrian soldiers ruthlessly tore the child from his father. They seized Tell, bound him with strong cords, carried him down to the lake, and threw him into the waiting boat.



TELL RETURNS TO HIS WIFE AND BOY

Pitying friends carried the heart-broken little boy back to his home at Bürglen, and told his mother the terrible news. Quickly it spread through the canton, and there were few who dared to hope that William Tell would ever be seen in Uri again, for they knew what happened to prisoners who were shut up in Austrian dungeons. They had lost one on whom their hopes had rested, a man strong and fearless, loyal to the cause ; he would be terribly missed when the three cantons rose against their tyrants. But the loss filled them with rage, not dismay ; and the leaders hurriedly made plans to hasten their rising that

William Tell

they might try to rescue Tell before the Austrian dungeon had done its fatal work.

That night Tell's wife was sitting sadly in her cottage, while the little boy, worn out with grief and terror, slept on a bed in the corner of the room. The door opened softly, and Tell himself came in. His wife cried out in joy and astonishment, scarcely able to believe her eyes. Her husband took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly, assuring her that he was safe and unharmed ; then they both sat down, and, speaking softly so as not to awaken the exhausted child, he told her what had happened after he had been thrown into Gessler's boat.

"They rowed out over the lake," he said, "but very soon a storm such as we sometimes have came up, with a great wind and rain and darkness. The boat was driven about wildly, so that the men were frightened, and besought Gessler to unloose my bonds that I might guide the boat, since I alone had the skill and knowledge that could save them. So they unbound me, and I steered toward a place I knew where is a piece of rock on which a man may land, though with danger, for the foothold is difficult and the water there is very deep. When we came near this place I leapt suddenly on shore and none dared follow me. They shouted threats and curses at me as I sped away over the rocks, but they could not stop or harm me.

"I hid myself in the Hohle Gasse, the narrow way you know of between the mountains, for I knew that if Gessler and his men managed to reach the land they must pass that way homeward. And they did. After many hours I saw them coming, so I placed myself behind a rock and shot an arrow straight and true to the tyrant's heart."

His wife cried out in terror. "Oh, what will become of you ? They will surely find you and kill you for this deed."

"Nay, fear not," he answered, "the tyrant is dead, and I am here, safe among friends. Soon our country shall be free from all tyrants. This deed of mine doth but hasten by a little the day of vengeance. For know, my wife, that the men of the forest cantons have sworn to rise on the first day of the new year and take arms to throw off the yoke of their oppressors. I

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did not tell you before, for I feared that it might trouble you, but now you shall know all."

Then he told her of the midnight meeting, and how her father and the other two leaders had vowed to fight to the death that their country might be free; and how they had taken for the motto of their rising, "One for all and all for one."

"So it shall be," he said, "and before men thus united the



TELL ESCAPES FROM THE BOAT

Austrians will not be able to stand. Our preparations have gone on steadily, and though it is now only the end of November, in a few days we shall be able to take the field. The news of Gessler's death will spread among the people, and they will rise joyfully and fight like the noble Switzers that they are."

So it fell out. Before the next evening all the men of the forest cantons knew that their tyrant was dead, and that Tell was free. Full of joy and hope, they thronged to the appointed meeting-places, and their leaders decided that the time had come for the great blow to be struck.

William Tell

All the might of the tyrants could not prevail against these hardy, fearless mountaineers. In each of the three cantons the power of the Austrians was broken, the governors killed, and the rule of the Swiss set up. The land was free.

When the rising was over and the victory won William Tell went back to his cottage and lived there as simply and quietly as he had done before. He did not care for power or position ; it was enough for him to know that he had helped to make his country free. He could roam over the mountains he loved, hunt in the forests, fish in the streams, sail over the beautiful lake without interference from the hated stranger. He saw his countrymen as free and happy as himself. This was what he had fought for, and he was content.

So he lived for many years. Then on a bleak winter day a child fell into one of the rushing mountain streams near his home. Tell was an old man by this time, but at once he plunged into the ice-cold water to rescue the child. He went home chilled and shivering, and in a few days he was dead.

Switzerland has never forgotten William Tell, and holds him as the chief of her heroes. A great statue of him has been set up in the market-place of Altdorf on the spot where he shot the apple from the head of his son. A chapel has been built on the place where he leapt to shore from Gessler's boat ; another on the spot where Gessler fell, slain by the patriot's arrow ; a third on the site of the cottage at Bürglen where he lived. Countless songs and stories have been made about him, and the famous drama of the German poet Schiller has kept his name in remembrance far beyond the borders of his own country.

CHAPTER XIII

KING ROBERT THE BRUCE

WHEN little Margaret, the 'Maid of Norway,' heiress to the throne of Scotland, died in the year 1290 the Scots were greatly troubled and perplexed, for they knew that their jealous and powerful neighbour, England, would seize the opportunity to try yet again to assert her sovereignty over the stubborn northern kingdom. An heir to the vacant throne had to be chosen from among the descendants of King William 'the Lion,' and it added to the difficulties of the Scots that one of these was an old gentleman of eighty-nine, Robert de Bruce, Lord of Annandale, while the other, John Baliol, was regarded as little better than an Englishman. Edward I of the long shanks having been asked to choose between the two claimants, naturally chose Baliol, but the Scots never accepted that unlucky shadow of a king, and during the brief years that he ruled over them they made him feel that they regarded him as an intruder. Meanwhile a young Scotsman of the blood royal was growing to manhood and being trained in knightly accomplishments at the English Court. He was Robert, Earl of Carrick, the grandson of that Robert de Bruce who had claimed the throne when the Maid of Norway died. Like other Scots nobles of that stormy time, Robert was forced to take an oath of fealty to the English King. But when he returned to his own country his heart burned within him to think that a people once proud, and warlike, and free, should lie helpless under the Plantagenet heel, and when that gallant rebel Sir William Wallace raised the standard of revolt in 1297 it is impossible to doubt that the sympathies of the young Earl of Carrick were with him. But the time had not yet come when that young Earl felt strong enough to assert his claim to the throne, to defy England, and

King Robert the Bruce

to rally round him all the loyal and patriotic forces in the land. He had to bide his time. With John Comyn, nephew of Baliol, he came to an understanding as to their rights and inheritances, but such an understanding was far more likely to inflame quarrels than to appease them. In 1306, Robert Bruce, having heard, and believed, that Comyn had betrayed to the English King the pact that he had entered into with his rival, charged the young man with this betrayal, as they stood together before the high altar of the church of the Minorite Friars in Dumfries. Some ancient chroniclers declare that the pact had actually been written upon parchment and sealed by Bruce and Comyn, and that the latter, in order to gain the favour of King Edward and at the same time to get rid of his rival claimant, had placed the fatal document in the hands of the English King. Whatever may have been the course of events, it is certain that Bruce suspected the Red Comyn of double dealing, and that he gave utterance to his suspicions in a very unexpected and unsuitable place. Perhaps he may have thought to surprise a confession out of Comyn, who, however false he was, might be reluctant to perjure himself in the house of God. Comyn, however, hotly denied that he had betrayed his rival. And the impetuous Bruce, forgetting where he was, drew his dagger and stabbed his companion to the heart. Then, aghast at what he had done, he rushed out of the sanctuary which he had desecrated with blood. Outside, the first person he encountered was a knight, called Kirkpatrick, one of his faithful adherents. "I doubt," gasped Bruce, "I doubt I have killed the Red Comyn!" "Ye doubt!" echoed Kirkpatrick, "I'se mak' siccar!" (I'll make sure!) And the relentless Scot, fearing for his master's life if Comyn should recover from the first blow, ran back into the church and dealt a second which placed the victim's death beyond doubt. Grants of lands in the county of Dumfries afterward marked Bruce's gratitude to this devoted follower, who had cared more for his lord's safety than for the safety of his own soul; and the Kirkpatrick family motto to this day is *I'se mak' siccar*, while their crest is a hand holding a dagger dripping with blood.

Two months later, on the twenty-seventh day of March,

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Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, was crowned in the ancient monastery at Scone, the traditional scene of Scottish coronations since the dawn of history. Surely no King of Scotland, or of any land, was ever crowned more hurriedly and with less pomp than was this tall, keen-eyed Robert, when the Bishop of St Andrew's set a plain gold circlet upon his head. Edward Longshanks had carried off to England not only the Scottish regalia, the sceptre, orb, and crown, but also the famous Stone of Destiny, upon which the kings of Scotland had been crowned ever since the sixth century, and the kings of Ireland long before then, when it stood upon the holy hill of Tara. For the loss of this mysterious stone the Scots consoled themselves as best they might with the old prophecy that wherever that stone stood, the Scots should reign—a prophecy strangely fulfilled three hundred years later, when the son of Mary Stuart ascended the English throne. But there were other curious and disheartening circumstances at the crowning of the Bruce besides the absence of the regalia and the Stone of Destiny. It mattered less that he had to borrow garments of white velvet from the Bishop of Glasgow, that his 'crown' was a simple circlet of gold, than that the very bishop who absolved him from his oath of allegiance to King Edward had himself taken the same oath, and was as deeply perjured as the man upon whom he pronounced the solemn words of absolution. Only three bishops and two earls were present at the 'mairied rites' in the Abbey of Scone. Ever since the day when the chief of the Macduffs had slain Macbeth in battle and so helped to replace Malcolm, the rightful heir, upon the Scottish throne, the chiefs of that clan had possessed the privilege of setting the crown upon the head of each successive King of Scotland at his coronation. But the Earl of Fife was not among the three earls who gathered at Scone to see King Robert crowned. In 1306 the chief of the Macduffs was Edward's liegeman, and the Bruce's foe. Two days later, however, his sister Isabel, Countess of Buchan, arrived at Scone, and insisted upon exercising the family right, and upon setting the golden circlet upon the head of Bruce, who was thus 'crowned' twice, once by a bishop and once by a dauntless lady. As we shall

King Robert the Bruce

see, the Countess was cruelly punished by the English King for thus openly proclaiming her allegiance to his rival.

Meanwhile messengers had carried to Rome tidings of the deed of blood with which the church of the Minorite Friars at Dumfries had been desecrated by the newly crowned and, in a sense, self-styled, King of Scotland. Two months after that hurried

and shabby ceremony at Scone Bruce was solemnly excommunicated by the Pope's legate at Carlisle, while all his estates were declared forfeit to the English crown. Everything was against him. His two chief foes, spiritual and temporal, were the head of the Christian Church and one of the greatest warrior-kings in Christendom; his followers were few, he had neither fortress nor walled town in which to take refuge, and the county over which he nominally held sway was, in the words of an old Scottish chronicler, "well stuffed" with English garrisons. It seemed as if the reign of Robert the Bruce were fated to be brief and inglorious, a mere episode, and an unimportant one at that, in the history of Scotland.

When Edward of England heard how the Red Comyn had been slain, and how his slayer had gone through the mummary of being 'crowned' at Scone, he made a solemn vow to take no rest until he had avenged the murder and meted out a terrible

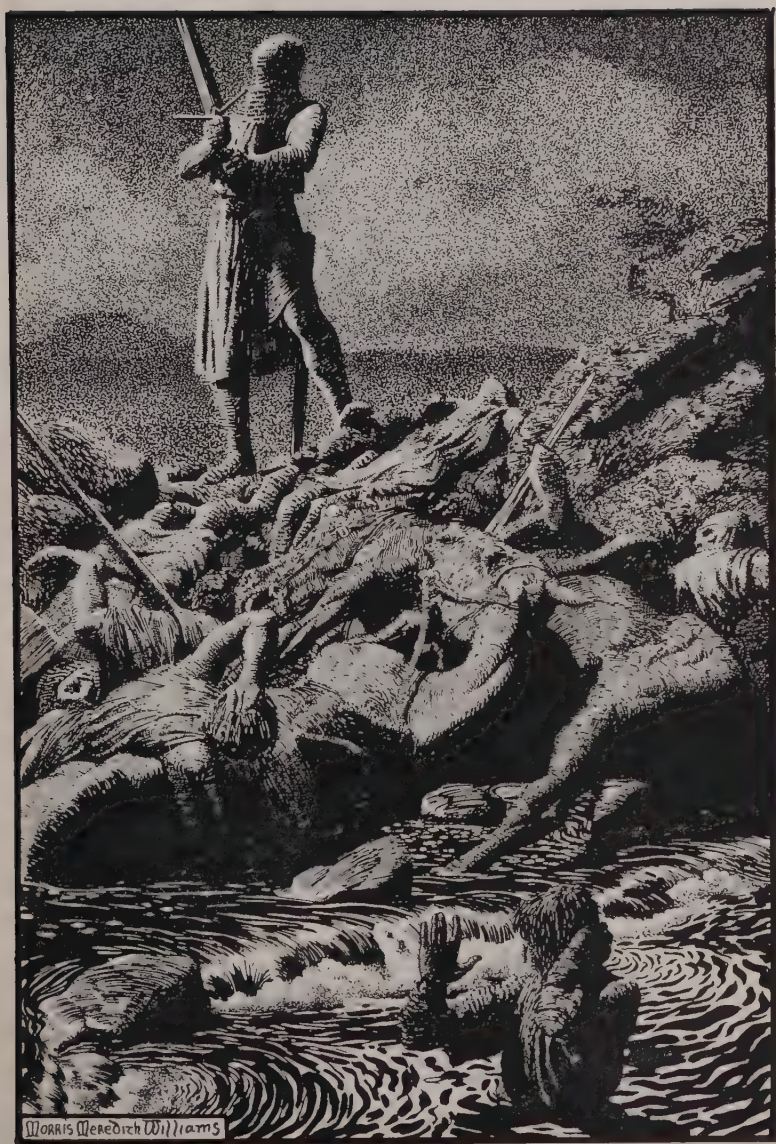


THE COUNTESS OF BUCHAN CROWNS
BRUCE

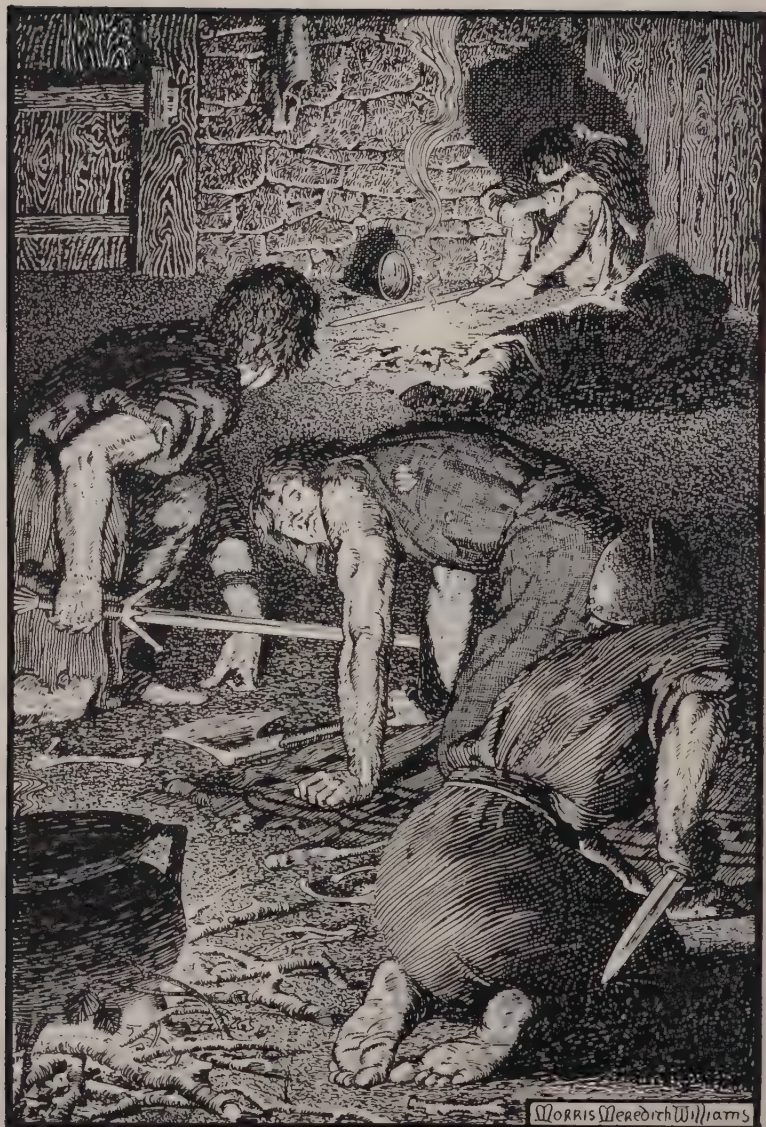
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punishment to Bruce and to all Bruce's adherents. His first step was to levy fresh troops for the march against Scotland, and to appoint his cousin, Sir Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, Governor of that rebellious little country. Pembroke had an especial grudge against Bruce because his sister Joan had been the wife of the Red Comyn, and but for that fatal blow in the friars' church at Dumfries she might have been Queen of Scotland one day. With Sir Henry Piercy, the Earl hurried north, and established himself in the fair city of Perth. He was reputed to be a valiant warrior—you may see his carven effigy in the choir of Westminster Abbey, with his feet resting upon a lion—but Piers Gaveston, on account of his queer dark looks, nicknamed him 'Joseph the Jew.' When word was brought to Pembroke that the Bruce, at the head of a small army, was in the neighbourhood of Perth and challenged him to come forth and do battle then and there, the English commander sent a message to the effect that the day was now too far spent, but that he would be blithe to meet the Scots on the morrow. Trusting to the honour of his adversary, Bruce withdrew to a little wood, known as the Wood of Methven, and prepared to camp there with his men for the night. But as the sun was setting beyond the purple western hills the English forces fell upon them suddenly. The Scottish King quickly rallied his followers, and, led by him, they put up a stout fight. Not until dusk had fallen and Bruce himself had been four times unhorsed, did the Scots decide to withdraw. Their only line of retreat lay through the wilds of Athol, where, among the steep crags and shaggy glens, the English would find pursuit difficult, if not impossible.

But the armies of 'Joseph the Jew' were not the only foes whom Bruce had to fear. Some of the Highland chieftains were kinsmen or adherents of the Red Comyn, others held themselves bound by the oaths of fealty which they had sworn to Edward. Alexander, the chief of the Macdougalls, who had married Comyn's aunt, surprised and attacked the King at Dalry, near the head of Loch Tay, in a narrow defile where Bruce could not use his cavalry against the clansmen. There



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THE THREE TRAITORS

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the King was forced to retreat, fighting to the last. It may have been about this time that he spent a night in a cave with a flock of goats for company. It is said that in memory of this little adventure he afterward made a law that all goats should be allowed free grazing throughout his realm !

The Queen had been compelled to take to flight before the oncoming hosts of Pembroke and Piercy. Nigel, the youngest of her brothers-in-law, had first escorted her to Aberdeen, but as the English continued to advance, the King took her and her ladies with him to the mountains of Breadalbane, where they led a wandering, open-air life which was pleasant enough while the summer lasted. As the old riming chronicler, John Barbour, puts it—

Then to the hill they rode their way
Where great default of meat had they.

The sad plight of the ladies touched the heart of one of Bruce's most famous followers, Sir James Douglas, and he bestirred himself gallantly on their behalf. He brought down stags with his crossbow, he caught trout, eels, pike, and salmon in the lochs and rivers, nay, he even provided minnows when all else failed ! None of his knights was dearer to Bruce than this tall, black-haired Douglas, whose jokes were made all the more quaint by the lisping voice in which they were uttered. It is clear from many anecdotes that the King himself had a boyish love of fun, and one pictures him and Douglas chaffing each other, and exchanging quips and jests, to keep up the drooping spirits of the hungry ladies and the weary men-at-arms.

The life led by Bruce and his followers during the summer of 1306 was not unlike that led by Robin Hood and his merry men in Sherwood Forest a hundred years before—a roving, breezy life, full of danger and excitement and sport. Only one cannot imagine Robin Hood taking a great book and reading aloud from it to his green-clad gang ! Reading was an unusual accomplishment in Scotland six hundred years since, and many of Bruce's men must have gazed at him with awe when he opened the gilded clasps of his book, and turned the vellum leaves, and

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told them what old tales of chivalry were written there in angular black characters with capitals of brilliant scarlet.

With the approach of winter the hardships of the wanderers increased. It was decided that the Queen and her ladies should be placed in the care of the Earl of Athol and Sir Nigel Bruce at Kildrummie Castle, where it was hoped that the English

could not reach them, while the King and a handful of followers attempted to escape to northern Ireland, to seek shelter and aid from the Queen's kinsfolk in Ulster.

At the castle of Dunaverty, in Kintyre, Bruce and his companions tarried for three days as the guests of the loyal-hearted chieftain, Angus of Islay. Then they determined to push on again, for if once they reached Ireland they thought they might spend the winter there, rest after their long ordeal, refurbish their weapons, and gather together fresh troops with which to renew the struggle against England in the spring. Four miles off



BRUCE READING TO HIS FOLLOWERS

the Irish coast, upon a tiny speck of an island called Rathlin, Bruce and his three hundred weatherbeaten followers landed, to the no small alarm of the poor fisherfolk who were its only inhabitants. Fearing pillage and oppression, the islanders hurriedly collected their cattle and began to drive them inland, to escape the supposed freebooters. But Bruce sent messengers to overtake them with promises that no man should harm them

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if they would share their food with his men as long as they tarried upon Rathlin.

At first they may have intended to tarry only a short time upon the island, but actually they remained there throughout the winter, which must have seemed terribly long and grey and cold. Meanwhile Edward Longshanks was wasting Scotland with fire and sword, and harrying Bruce's kinsfolk and friends without mercy. Kildrummie Castle was forced to surrender, and the gallant young Nigel Bruce, together with the other Scottish knights and gentlemen who had shared in the defence, were hurried in chains to Berwick Castle and there hanged as traitors. The Queen and the young Princess, Marjory Bruce, afterward wife of Walter the Steward and ancestress of the Stuart dynasty, sought sanctuary at St Duthac, in Ross-shire. The rights of sanctuary were very well defined in the Middle Ages, and were seldom disregarded, even by violent and ill-disposed men. Bruce's wife, Elizabeth of Ulster, and her step-daughter, his child by his first marriage with Isabella of Mar, must have thought themselves safe from all their foes, both them of England and them "of their own household," when once they were within the sacred precincts of St Duthac. But it chanced that the Earl of Ross cared more for the favour of the English than for the displeasure of the Church. Profanely defying the privileges of St Duthac, he seized the Queen and the Princess, and delivered them over to their enemies. The Countess of Buchan was also captured, and imprisoned in a cage of wood and iron, hung from one of the towers of Berwick Castle!

Of all these things Bruce knew nothing while he abode upon Rathlin. Rumours went round that he was dead. But with the return of spring hope returned to him and his followers, and early in 1307 he proved that he was alive by making a successful raid on Arran, and seizing his own earldom of Carrick. The news was hailed with passionate joy by all loyal Scots, but those of the English party were much dismayed. 'Joseph the Jew' decided that what had been only a false rumour should be changed into solid truth. So he dispatched one of his English knights, Sir Ingram Bell, to Ayr, with orders to see if he could

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not hire murderers to get rid of this stubborn Scot who *would not* die. Sir Ingram, who was a cunning diplomatist, soon got into touch with a certain man of Carrick who had befriended Bruce more than once, and who would therefore be able to approach him without arousing suspicion. This fellow, and his two tall sons, Sir Ingram bribed with promises of "forty pounds' worth of good land," to be held by them and their heirs for ever. It was agreed that the three traitors should waylay Bruce when, as he was wont, he went forth, either alone or with only one little page, into the woods of Carrick. But a warning was conveyed to the King, nobody knows by whom, and he was on the alert, though he scorned to alter his usual customs, and neither increased his escort nor armed himself more heavily than before. One morning, then, the tall Bruce and his little page were walking in the greenwood, and they saw three men coming toward them. The eldest carried a sword, the second, a sword and an axe, the third, a sword and a spear. "These fellows will slay us, if they can," said Bruce to his page, "what weapons have you?" "Ah, Sire, in faith, I have but a bow and a bolt!" "Quick—give them to me——" "Ah, Sire, what must I do then?" "Stand aside and look on. If I win you will not lack weapons—if I fall save yourself by flight."

Now, but God help the noble King!
He is near hand to his ending:

So exclaims the old Scottish poet who tells this story in his rimed life of Robert the Bruce. As the three men drew nearer Bruce called sternly to the leader, whom he recognized as a former friend. "Traitor, you have sold me—advance no farther!" To which the fellow had the audacity to answer, "Sire, who should come nearer to you than *I*?" "I command you to come no nearer now," said Bruce. "If you have aught to say, speak where you are!" But the man, still protesting and pleading, continued to advance. Then Bruce raised the page's crossbow, and let fly the bolt. So true was the aim, that the traitor was struck full and fair in the eye, and fell to the ground.

King Robert the Bruce

The elder son, seeing his father overthrown, rushed forward and struck at the King with his axe. But Bruce raised his great sword, without which he never went abroad, and dealt him such a terrific blow that the blade cleft the skull asunder. Then came the second son, he who was armed with a spear. Bruce waited till the weapon almost touched him before, with one swift sweep of his sword, he severed the spear-head from the shaft. Two minutes later the second son lay dead upon the grass beside his father and brother. "Our Lord be praised," cried the little page, running to his master, "our Lord be praised, Who gave you the might to overcome this treason with such speed!" But Bruce looked down sadly at the three dead traitors. "God wot," he said, "they might have been worthy fellows all three—had not treachery been their undoing."

Not long afterward tidings came to the King that two hundred men of Galloway were on his track, and had sleuth-hounds with them, with whose aid they hoped to find his hiding-place. Bruce's first step was to put running water between himself and his pursuers. He led his weary followers across a dreary morass, and when they had reached the swift stream that ran through it they found a ford and made their way to the other side. Dusk was falling. Two bow-shots from the stream the King's quick eyes discovered a patch of firm and dry land. "Bide ye here and rest awhile," he said to his men, "I will keep watch by the ford." Then Bruce took with him two of his sergeants, leaving his trusty friend, Sir Gilbert le Hay, in charge of those that remained behind, and went down to the banks of the stream to reconnoitre. The stream was swift and deep, and hills rose steeply on either side. The King soon satisfied himself that the only spot where it was fordable was the spot where he and his men had crossed, and that more than one man could not cross at a time.

Presently he heard the far-off baying of a hound, and halted to listen. He was loth to rouse his weary men upon what might prove to be a false alarm, but the sound grew more and more clear, and soon the thud of horses' hooves and the clash of arms were mingled with it. Then Bruce bade his two sergeants hurry

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back to Sir Gilbert le Hay with tidings that the enemy were at hand ; he himself remained by the ford, one man against two hundred. When the Galloway men saw by the light moonlight a solitary knight in armour standing on the other side of the swift stream they laughed aloud, and rushed ahead, sure that they could soon dispose of this audacious foe who waited for them so unflinchingly. But, as Bruce had foreseen, they could come only one by one. The first to plunge through the ford was a horseman. Him Bruce killed with one thrust of his spear, and as the dead man's steed stumbled and fell the King's dagger put an end to its pain, and the animal's body formed a barrier from behind which he could strike at the oncoming attackers. The next horseman, and the next, shared the same fate. Soon five dead riders and five dead horses lay between Bruce and his foes. The Galloway men were taken aback and lost much of their assurance. Some of them even proposed prompt retreat ; others, more stout-hearted, declared that they would be laughed at if they allowed themselves to be daunted by one man. So they plucked up spirit, and renewed the onslaught. But they fared no better than their fellows. Bruce's gigantic bodily strength, his quick hand and eye, his indomitable courage, were too much for them. When the farther bank of the stream was heaped high with slain the survivors of the two hundred Galloway men decided that they had had enough. By the time that Sir Gilbert le Hay and his troops reached the ford, only that grim mound of dead horses and their dead riders was to be seen in the weird blue moonlight. They looked round anxiously in quest of their King, and presently they saw him sitting a little apart, with the moon shining upon his ruddy hair. He had unlaced and removed his helmet in order to take breath after his labours—for it is no light task to defend yourself against twice a hundred foes !

After this exploit became known the enthusiasm of the Scottish people flamed up afresh, and their former belief that Bruce was the man chosen by God to lead them to victory awoke in their hearts again. Here, they thought, here was a leader worth following to the death !

King Robert the Bruce

Edward Longshanks heard with surprise that he, the ' Hammer of the Scots,' had not succeeded in crushing that stubborn race after all! Soon English reinforcements began to pour across the Border, the English garrisons were strengthened, and long trains of wagons, laden with spears, arrows, and crossbows, creaked and floundered along the ill-made highroads toward the north.

Bruce now resolved to risk a clash with the Earl of Pembroke's forces, though these outnumbered his own, and were better armed and mounted. The risk he took would have been fully justified had he not been attacked in the rear by Sir John of Lorn, a Scottish knight but a false one, while he and his vanguard were engaged with Pembroke's cavalry. Bruce had no choice but to order his men to scatter and disperse in small companies, but he named a place where they were to reassemble, and where he would resume command of them, when the English pursuit should have been baffled, and John of Lorn's highlanders withdrawn. Now the false Sir John had somehow got possession of a bloodhound which had formerly belonged to Bruce himself, and he now set this beast upon the track of its old master. The hound had been a favourite with Bruce, and many a time had fed from the King's own hand. It soon picked up the trail, and showed by joyous barks that it knew whose were the footsteps it had scented. John of Lorn also was joyous, though he probably gave utterance to his joy in a slightly different manner. When Bruce realized that he was being hunted by his own hound he ordered the men who had remained with him to leave him and scatter in all directions, except a foster-brother of his, whom he told to stay behind. He hoped thus to confuse the trail, and put the pursuing hound off the scent. But the clever beast steadily continued the pursuit, and the deep sound of its bark grew nearer, and yet more near. John of Lorn now chose five of his men, the fleetest of foot and the stoutest of heart in the whole band, and bade them run with all their might until they overtook the two fugitives whose track the hound was following, " for," said he, " one of the twain is him whom we seek, and in no wise must ye suffer him to escape you."

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Soon Bruce's foster-brother saw these men approaching, and warned the King. Then quoth Bruce :

" Say, is there any help in thee ?
For we shall soon assailed be."

" Sire," returned his foster-brother, " I will do all that I may."
" Thou sayst well, perfay," said the King. " Now, I will abide here, and see what these fellows may do."

Lorn's men now came up with them, and three fell upon the King, while two attacked his companion. With one of his terrific strokes Bruce laid the foremost low ; then, as the other two drew back, he took a flying leap to the aid of his hard-pressed foster-brother, one of whose assailants he beheaded with a single stroke before he turned to face the third and fourth. After a desperate struggle they, too, were slain, and soon afterward the fifth was dispatched by the King's companion.

" Perfay," then said the King, " thou hast helped me right well ! "

" Sire," returned the foster-brother modestly, " it pleases you to say so—but the great part you took upon yourself, who slew four of the five alone."

" Why," said the King, " as the game went, I had more leisure to do it than thou—thy two, seeing me set upon by three, paid no heed to me, nor recked that I might prove dangerous to them."

Meanwhile John of Lorn and his followers were drawing near, and the barking of the hound was heard again. " I have known men to say that running water will put a hound off the scent," said the King, " let us wade a little way along that stream, and see if it be so."

So they went knee-deep into the swiftly-flowing water, and presently the hound checked, and its confident bark changed to a doubtful, puzzled whimpering, and after a little while John of Lorn realized that the scent was lost, and that there was nothing for it but to call off the chase for that day. But Bruce's dangers were not yet at an end. When Pembroke heard of the failure of John of Lorn's hunting he cast about for some other means of

King Robert the Bruce

ridding himself and his royal cousin of this indomitable enemy. So, soon after the hound had been baffled, Bruce and his foster-brother, as they were crossing a wild heath, encountered three countrymen, armed with axes and swords, of whom one bore a fine sheep across his shoulders. They hailed the King, and when he asked them what they would they said they were seeking Robert the Bruce, that they might enroll themselves beneath his banner. "Is it so?" said the King. "Then come with me, and you will soon see him." The men guessed, perhaps from a twinkle in the royal eye, that the speaker was the King himself, and, so startled did they appear, Bruce's suspicions were at once aroused. When they would have fallen in behind him he remarked that until he was better acquainted with them he would prefer them to walk in front, and this they were compelled to do, still carrying the sheep, until they reached a lonely and deserted little house. There they proposed to camp for the night. The sheep was slain, and divided in half, and while the King and his foster-brother roasted *their* half over an open fire at *one* end of the room, the three strangers roasted *their* half over a second fire at the *other* end. After his rough but very welcome supper, the King grew drowsy, and, in the quaint words of the old Scottish poet, "wink'd a little wee"—which means that he did not allow himself to fall fast asleep, for he distrusted the three men sitting round the fire only a few paces away. His foster-brother, however, was soon snoring loudly. Presently the men whispered to each other that now was the time to strike, for assuredly both Bruce and his companion were deep in slumber. Three swords were softly drawn, and three figures crept softly toward the dying fire beside which the King sat dozing with his chin on his hand. But before they reached him Bruce had sprung up, baring his blade. As he did so he tried to rouse his foster-brother with a touch of his foot, but the poor fellow was so sleepy that one of the traitors was able to strike him down before he was more than half awake. There was a terrible struggle in that lonely little house, but after a time the clash of steel and the straining and thudding of feet died away, and Robert the Bruce came forth alive, but alone. Dusk

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was falling fast, and it was high time for him to seek the place where his scattered followers were to reassemble. Dejected by the loss of his faithful friend, and stained and worn with the ordeal of the last few hours, the King plodded across the heath until he came to a little house hard by the rallying-point. He saw a gleam of firelight, and, pushing open the unbarred door, entered a humble room where he found an old woman sitting by her hearth.

"Who are you?" asked the old dame. "Whence come you? Whither bound?"

"I am a poor traveller, good dame," answered the King. "And I go up and down the country."

"All travellers are welcome here, for the sake of one," said the woman.

"Good dame," asked the King curiously, "who is the man for whose sake you are so well disposed toward wanderers?"

"Troth, sir, I will tell you. He is King Robert the Bruce, the rightful lord of this land. His foes are many now. But I look to see the day when he shall have overcome them all, and when none may stand against him."

"Dame, do ye love him so well?"

"Yea, sir. God knoweth that I do."

"Dame, lo, he is beside you now! For I am he."

"Ah, sir," exclaimed the good woman, starting up, "then why are you all alone? Where are your men?"

"For the moment, dame, I have no more men."

"This must not be," said the stout-hearted dame. "I have two sturdy sons hard by. They shall swear fealty to you now, and be your true servants."

So the two stalwart young men were brought in, and, at their mother's bidding, they knelt and vowed before God to serve King Robert faithfully. Then the good woman hastened to set before the weary King such plain fare as her little house could offer. He had not eaten many mouthfuls when there was a great stamping and clattering outside. The two youths sprang forward to defend their new master, but a moment later the voice of Sir James Douglas rose above the din, and Bruce joyfully bade the door be

King Robert the Bruce

opened. Then the Douglas entered, and Sir Edward, the King's brother, eagerly asking how he had fared since they last saw him ; while outside the little house such of the hundred and fifty true men who could not thrust their way within rejoiced at their leader's escape from death, and waited for him to come forth and lead them again against the false knight of Lorn and 'Joseph the Jew.'

Bruce did not keep them waiting long. Before the sun rose again he had fallen upon the English outposts, and had dealt them such a smashing blow that King Edward's commander was forced to retreat to Carlisle. The offensive then passed from Pembroke to Bruce. With a small force, but with a high heart, the King of Scots descended from the hills, and subdued the districts of Kyle, Carrick, and Cunningham. In one skirmish after another the Scots defeated the English and their allies, and every messenger that reached Pembroke's headquarters brought more disquieting news than the last. Then Pembroke sent a challenge to Bruce, bidding him meet him upon the open ground under Loudoun Hill on the tenth day of May, and adding that Bruce would add more to his renown by taking and giving 'hard dints' upon equal terms than by ambushes and raids, and what he impolitely described as 'skulking.' Bruce proudly accepted the challenge, and upon the tenth day of May the Battle of Loudoun Hill was fought, and six hundred Scots, chiefly infantry, soundly defeated three thousand English troops, of which the greater part were mounted. It was at Loudoun that Bruce learnt the priceless military lesson that good infantrymen drawn up in squares can get the better of superior numbers of cavalry. This discovery was all the more valuable to him because the English were rich in horses, and the Scots were poor. Three days later the Scottish King met and beat Ralph, Earl of Gloucester, in open field. The tide had turned, with a vengeance ! Though he had still much to endure and much to do, Bruce was now borne onward on the irresistible current of success.

These tidings reached King Edward as he lay dying at Carlisle, and roused the old warrior to fury. He rose from his death-

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bed, mounted his war-horse, and turned his face toward the north. But at Burgh-on-Sands, an obscure village on the Border, he gave up the ghost, leaving his weak and irresolute son Edward II to carry on the war against Bruce. The dying King willed that his bones should be carried at the head of the English army until Scotland were subdued, but his son does not



WATCHING THE ENGLISH ADVANCE

seem to have carried out this gruesome request, for Edward of the long shanks was buried in the glorious Abbey of Westminster upon St Jude's day, 1307, a few feet away from the Stone of Destiny which he had brought from Scotland in triumph ten years before. According to the legend, he further willed that his tomb should be left unfinished until the Scots were finally defeated by the English. It is unfinished to this day.

Before Edward I had reposed for two years in his sarcophagus made of five rough blocks of grey marble Bruce had turned

the tables on his successor by invading England, and marching as far south as Durham. In 1312 he renewed the attack, and, after burning Hexham and Corbridge, exacted tribute from the clergy and people of the four northernmost English counties. One English garrison in Scotland fell after another, Perth, Roxburgh, Edinburgh Castle. At last, roused by the repeated triumphs of the Scots, Edward II resolved to imitate the example

King Robert the Bruce

of his warlike father, and invade Scotland. At the head of a magnificent and well-equipped army of some hundred thousand men, he crossed the Border and advanced toward Stirling, where, on the field of Bannockburn, Robert the Bruce awaited him, with a force of only thirty thousand men, to whom must be added some fifteen thousand wagoners, camp-followers, cooks, and grooms. For his lieutenants Bruce had his brother, the valiant Sir Edward, his nephew, Randolph, Earl of Moray, Walter, the High Steward, a gallant youth of twenty-one, and his old comrade-in-arms, the dark-browed, merry-hearted James Douglas. The night before the battle was spent by the Scots in prayer, while the English held revel by their camp-fires. But the Scots had not been wholly occupied with deeds of piety. They had also found time to dig a number of deep pits, and plant sharp stakes in them, at the point where the English cavalry were expected to make their first charge.

When the two armies were drawn up facing each other, but before the clash of battle began, an English knight, Sir Henry Bohun by name, caught the gleam of a gold circlet on the head of a tall Scot who was riding up and down the front ranks of the Scottish forces on a little grey nag. Sir Henry then set in his spurs and galloped impetuously forward, trusting to the superior size and speed of his horse, and determined to decide the fortunes of the day by slaying the King of Scots forthwith. But at a touch of its master's heel the clever grey nag swerved aside, and Bohun's blow missed its mark. Then Bruce rose up in his stirrups, swung his axe above his head, and with one mighty stroke clove the Englishman's head and body asunder, so that the axe-blade was wedged in the base of Bohun's spine and the shaft snapped in two. So began the battle of Bannockburn, upon the twenty-fourth of June, 1314. It was a fierce battle, and a long one, and much valour was shown on both sides. The thrill of combat infected even the cooks and the wagoners, who were watching from afar, and, hurriedly tying great sheets upon poles by way of banners, they came pouring down the slope to join in the fray. When the English, who were already growing disheartened, saw these unexpected reinforcements advancing

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they mistook the sheets for the banners they were intended to represent, and, after wavering a little, they broke, scattered and fled. When the crash and thunder of the battle died down more than thirty thousand Englishmen lay dead upon the field of Bannockburn, of these, two hundred were gold-spurred knights, and seven hundred were valiant esquires.



BANNOCKBURN

One of King Robert's first actions after victory was to demand from the defeated Edward the release of his Queen and Princess Marjory, who had been held captive in England ever since the Earl of Ross bore them away from the sanctuary of St Duthac. To escort the liberated ladies back to Scotland Bruce chose young Walter the Steward, him who had borne himself so valiantly at Bannockburn. A year later Sir Walter and the young Princess were married, and their son, Robert II, who was born in 1316, was the first Stuart King of Scotland and the ancestor

of the present reigning house of Great Britain.

Peace was finally sworn and sealed between Scotland and England after the death of Edward II, and the accession of his son, the gallant Edward III, founder of the Most Noble Order of the Garter. The reconciliation of the two neighbour-kingdoms was marked by the marriage of Bruce's only son, Prince David, with Joan of the Tower, the sister of the English King.

Bruce was not yet old in years, but the hardships and

King Robert the Bruce

tribulations of his early days had sapped his bodily strength, and he knew that for him "the bells were ringing to evensong." His life's work was done ; he had delivered Scotland from bondage, he had left in the hearts of his people the imperishable memory of a King who was dauntless in danger, brave and resourceful in war, high-hearted in adversity, gentle to the weak and helpless. Yet his conscience was stained with the blood of the Red Comyn, and death came before he could set forth on that pilgrimage to Palestine by which he had dreamed of wiping out the stain. As he lay dying he besought his old friend Sir James Douglas to bear his dead heart to Jerusalem and lay it in the holy earth of the City of Peace. Sir James promised, and only his own death upon the spear of a Saracen prevented him from fulfilling that vow.

On the seventh day of June, in the year 1329, at the Castle of Cardross, died King Robert the Bruce, the greatest of the epic heroes of Scottish history. It is recorded that when they heard the tidings of his death stern, battle-scarred Scottish warriors wept like little children.

